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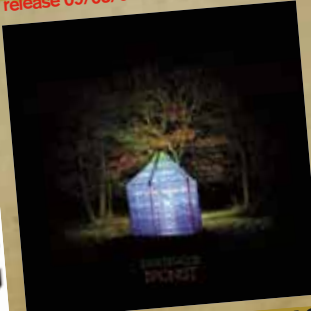
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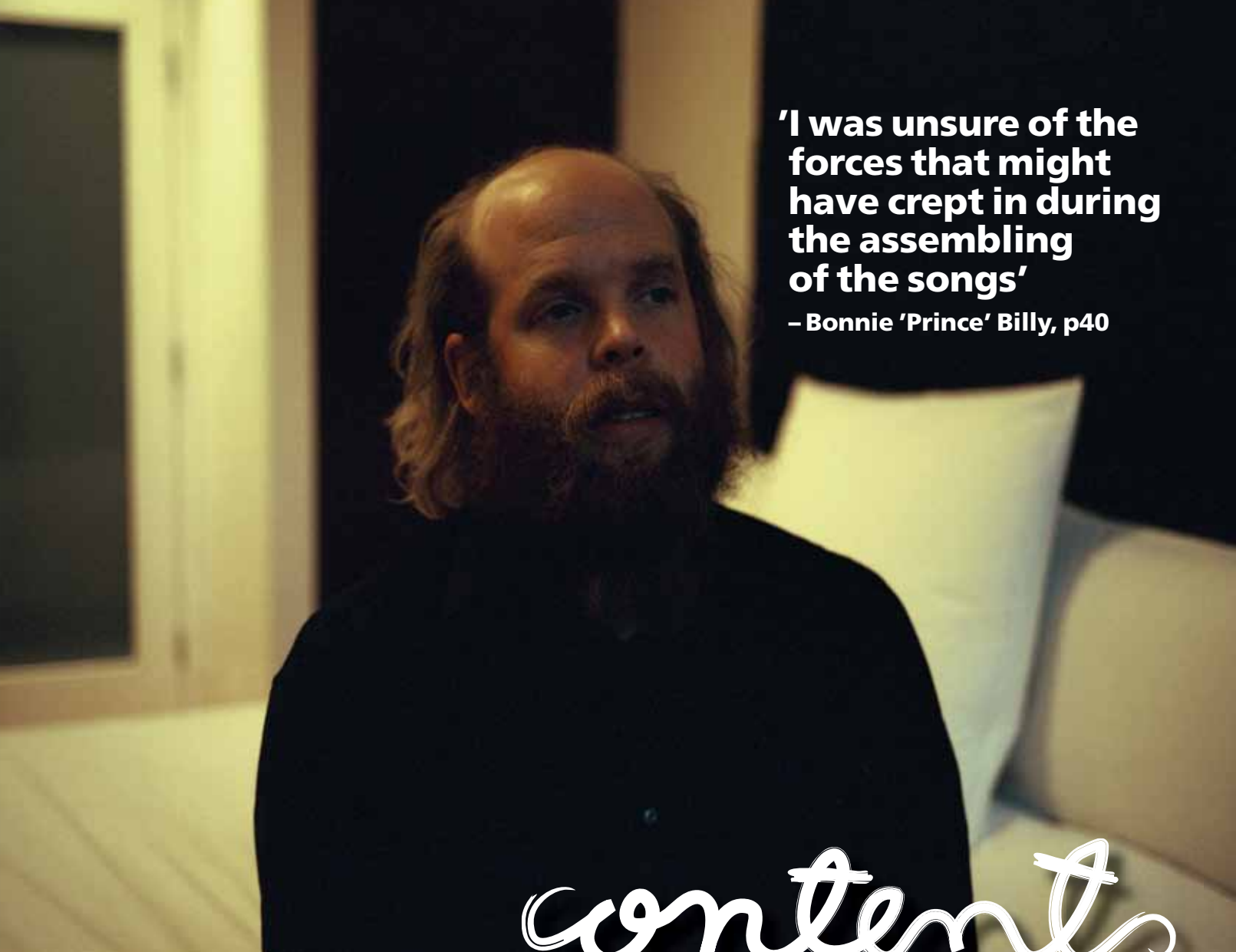
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**'I was unsure of the
forces that might
have crept in during
the assembling
of the songs'**

– Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, p40

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Cover photography: Justin Hollar

This month's cover star, as you have probably already clocked, is Dan Deacon – the party-starting electronica wunderkind who broke cover a couple of years back with the elatory *Spiderman Of The Rings*, not to mention some sweat-misted live shows that saw Deacon playing day-glo conductor from right in the thick of the crowd. Thing is, though, it's impossible to talk about Deacon without talking a bit about Baltimore, too. If I were being poetic, I'd say their fates were intertwined, although more prosaically it's a matter of Deacon – an out-of-towner, originally from West Babylon, New York – and his friends in the Wham City collective seeing the city not as a dilapidated backwater, but as firm earth on which to build. That's not to say Wham City and its new crop of wide-eyed posi-kids is the only thing going on in Baltimore, though: as Riyyan Kidwell, formerly laptop rapper Cex and long-time Maryland resident recognises, this city has a history that stretches back beyond what he calls "neon sweatpants goofball shit"; from the brooding post-hardcore of Lungfish to the gritty thud of Bmore club music, as Kidwell puts it, "Baltimore's native strain of weirdness isn't clowny – it's psychotic."

Elsewhere this issue, we find another localised music culture taking its first vestigial steps. Ben Mechen's piece on funky, the latest strain in the winding history of London club music, is a neat little investigation that takes the pulse of a sound that's still finding its own identity. Veteran UK scribe Simon Reynolds has been back in the country recently, lecturing on his theory of the 'hardcore continuum', which postulates the scattered sub-genres of British dance culture constitute not isolated pockets, but an evolution, or a thread. There's been some debate as to where funky fits in this; a new twist, or an break from the continuum's innovative momentum? Personally, I hear a tune like KIG's 'Heads Shoulders Knees And Toes' and feel the same buzz I got when I first hear Wiley's 'Iglloo', or So Solid's 'Dilemma'.

It's possible funky is just a blip, a snapshot of music hurtling its way towards a new destination. But then, isn't there something thrilling about the idea of a missing link – the thing that exists, lives, and is gone? History is for the historians, and sure, there's a place for that – but the best things are made in the moment, unique and unrepeatable. Or, as that wise old goat Bonnie 'Prince' Billy puts it, later on this issue: "The unique power of recording equipment is that it actually can capture something as it's happening...something that's never happened before."

Louis Pattison

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live

in the flowers

Words: **George Taylor**

Photography: **Brian Wotnot**

Animal Collective

Glasgow School Of Art

Animal Collective, I guess, are becoming more like an observable ecosystem than a normal, regular, kiss yr posters and carve-their-name-bluntly-into-yr-arm rock band. When they first visited the UK over five years ago, an AC live show saw Avey Tare and Panda Bear hunched tightly over bare bones instrumentation, seeing-sawing between intense no-wave pounding and insular drones of fantasy pop. The cloaking device of bedroom pseudonyms, felt-tipped masks and long hair wigs, worn *Ringu*-fashion over the face, showed the influence of both the Sun City Girls' dada-punk performances and memories of childhood playtimes.

Since that time, the symbiotic evolution of the four members of the Collective – the other two being Geologist and Deakin – has reached such a distinctive level that knowledge of the contribution levels from each band member can give you accurate estimations of the type of flora and fauna yr gonna find on any given album. For example, if *Feels* is mostly Avey material, you'd be right in predicting that it was going to meander

We didn't know there was a tunnel between Floyd and Fabric

psychedelically like Syd Barret's white bike.

While the albums therefore stand as self-contained environments, the group's live show is an overgrown wilderness, the desire to drift between their various periods snapping the taut momentum of a set mostly reliant on their stunning new material. With *Merriweather Post Pavilion*, AC have delivered a true gift – a record about the desire for external pleasures, taking dance music out of the clubs and into the fields. Gone is the need to surround the music in theatre. The band tonight are clad in yr ultimate comfort clothes of tie-dyed tees and baggy grey hoodies.

The set opens with 'In The Flowers', as Panda Bear hatches his sample bank of their songs' electronic parts with the swirling piano line, and Avey folds himself around the lead vocal's long-distance love letter. Geologist trigger-controls the drums, and that first bass thump

of the night impacts up through the legs and down on yr head with a collision somewhere around the midriff. Several towers of lights stand sentinel behind the band, whipping out seizure-inducing spectrums at the appropriate moments. We didn't know there was a tunnel between Floyd and Fabric, but we do now.

For a portion of tonight's show Animal Collective far surpass what's expected of a band performance, combining the feel of a minimal techno set, with its intricate understanding of horizontal sound, and an expert jam-band's sense of how to fill space. The instantly anthemic 'My Girls' is dropped mid-set, shorn of the recorded version's "wooh!" and handclapping, bringing the Cologne-scented bassline that pulses underneath right into the foreground. This cross-fades into the schaffel pop of 'Summertime Clothes', with its chorus of "I want to walk around with you", the crowd sharing harmony duties. Finally, Panda Bear turns to the drum kit left of him, a searing 'Fireworks' climaxes with a colossal layering of noise, and suddenly the thread between past and present tightens.

At other moments though, the reality principle intrudes on the pleasure principle. The digi-crunk of 'Lion In A Coma' and 'Brother Sport', with its galloping harmonies, see the audience gradually losing themselves in Animal Collective's rave colour wheel. But then, the band set up

an endurance test of sorts, with a mid-set lull of 'Banshee Beat' and an indie-pop reworking of the much older 'Slippi', where guitar strumming overpowers bounce and focus loosens. They even stop attempting to fit the tracks into the flow of the set, and for the only time of the night, all onstage sound stops, reminding us of such a 'regular band' concept as between song banter.

But this is a minor criticism for what was clearly a remarkable show. The gleeful atmosphere of the Glasgow crowd afterwards feels tangible, and no one leaves the venue unsatisfied. But Animal Collective have reached a point in their evolution where they need to either adapt their history to the current format, or leave it to the past. It's understandable that if you developed gills you'd want to check out dry land once in a while, but not while yr mid-way to Atlantis, y'know?



THE VOID



wavves

Words: **Kev Kharas**
Illustration: **Mimi Leung**

Slacker blood runs deep in pop. Deeper than today's plaid-smothered hipster, currently existing at some indeterminate point between 1994 (*Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain, Clerks*) and 1999 (*Enema of the State, American Pie*). Ever since World War Two, to be slack is to be young, an evasion of daddy's suit chided in The Coasters' 'Yakety Yak' and the outrageous anti-beatnik cinema that emerged around the turn of the Fifties. The archetype of 'the teenager' supplied a narcissistic, nihilistic identity many were fated not to shake. Frankie Lymon wasn't a juvenile delinquent, but he did die a heroin addict at 25.

From street corner harmonies, then, to bedroom band, as unkempt peacocks follow audiences online. The latest embodiment of all that's slack and spare and rad is 22-year-old Nathaniel Williams, whose Wavves project – it surfs! It crashes! It drowns! – has been embraced by the internet more eagerly than a Rachel Bilson sex tape.

So how's real life handling the hype?

"I didn't really fucking do anything anyways," says Williams, slumber interrupted at home in San Diego. "I wake up – what's the time now? – around 10.55 and I'll do a couple interviews, then I'll smoke weed and play a little Xbox. And then me and Ryan will play music for a while. There's a routine but it's boring, and basically involves video games and weed."

That doesn't sound too bad to me.

"No, it's not bad. I couldn't be doing anything else."

Evidently, Williams has tried working for American Apparel, managing a record store and college (twice) but the latter "just didn't work" and "retail fucking sucks". He jacked it all in and sought solace in his record collection.

"It started around 10 or 11; I asked for Nirvana, *Nevermind* and Misfits, *Legacy Of Brutality*, I think. I wanted the first Snoop Dogg record too, but my

'I knew my parents didn't want me to listen to these bands'

parents didn't give me any of the cassettes I asked for, they gave me Oasis' (*What's The Story*) *Morning Glory?* instead."

Did that get played much?

"Haha, y'know what, actually I'm not gonna lie, I wore it thin regardless. I was just fucking 'Alright, fine I'll listen to it.' But it definitely left a taste in my mouth. I knew my parents didn't want me to listen to these bands so I tried doubly hard and once I did, it was like I'd found the holy grail, basically."

Williams enthuses about his crusades, disembowelling Nirvana to find The Wipers, The Vaselines and Sonic Youth before jumping from them to Dinosaur Jr "It was this wrecking ball that threw me through all the music I should've been listening to anyway. I got into it young."

When Nathan was eleven he was a "weirdo", attending private Christian school in Virginia. It was 1997. Napster wasn't launched for another two years, MySpace for another six. Why did this boy want to listen to *Legacy Of Brutality*?

"Skateboarding. I put together a board, got a couple videos and the soundtracks were so fucking cool. Maybe it was a Zero video, I dunno, but Souls Of Mischief were on it, Bad Brains and I was like, 'Holy Shit, this is so cool.'"

If anything deserves to benefit from the current excavation of Nineties slackness, it's the skate park; slacker cathedrals, a place the post-innocence, pre-pub weirdos can exist unharassed, to drink, smoke, chat shit. Wavves pays homage in the backyard skater art of a self-titled 12-inch, the seven-inch wrapped in grip tape, song titles littered with the gaggle drawn there ('Summer Goth', 'No Hope Kids', 'Killr Punx...', 'Vermin').

Musically, there's an instinctive understanding of youth's endless summers and the bands that've captured that; whether it be Red Cross or Frankie Lymon, No Age or The Challengers.

In the US, retail outlets dwindle, college grads face the worst job market for 30 years. Williams has a record deal and is touring Europe with one of his oldest friends, drummer Ryan Ulsh, in tow. "Everything worked out real cosmic."

Yeah man. Still, boredom persists.

"I used to go out drinking every day. I just got bored of it for now. It's always the same in San Diego, the people, the parties. I like everyone here, don't get me wrong, but I'm definitely ready to get the fuck out and go do something else."

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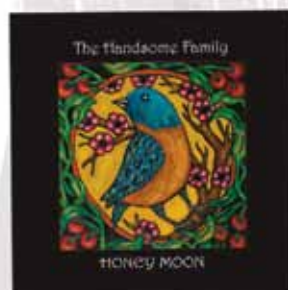
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syntheme

Words: Anna-Marie Fitzgerald

This is Syntheme: a blur of blonde and hot pink, an accidental 'acid house Barbie', with neon hardware under one arm and a Microkorg on her shopping list, "I'm not really a girly girl, but I like pink, it seems to have become a Syntheme trademark..."

Behind the mathematically-monikered, wired-up alter ego is Louise Wood, who just turned 24, was born in Aberdeen and has lived in Weymouth, Brighton and – of course – Berlin. In 2007 she spent eight months in techno-town. "It was a fantastic place to live," she says, "But the cheese was rubbish and they don't know what cider is."

"It seems a bit clichéd now for a musician to move to Berlin, but there's good reason. I was working over 52 hours a week in Brighton and was still skint. I had time in Berlin to make music and have a life."

She's been back for a year and working on her debut album, the no-fuss, speedy-fun *Lasers'n'Shit*. It lines up twenty tracks, some old, some new, and bookends them with the startlingly-voiced 'Mimtro' and Eighties funk of 'Electro Reading'. Squelching through acid house, dirty disco and a bunch of freaky samples, it throws together a party for dank raves and the morning-after crawl. Most tracks are built on a Roland TB-303 and coded with ridiculous, meaningless titles ('FabaceaeCPea', 'Frf3k Up!', 'Finnial')

Back to Lou, the girl who played drums at school, sang in the choir, joined bands and discovered the Prodigy's 'Breathe' aged 11 before ditching her college music courses because the boys pissed her off: "I have found it hard when I'm treated differently for being female. Since I started playing gigs I've experienced all kinds of shit. At one I played in Holland the bouncer on the door refused to let me in. He didn't believe I was playing. I don't think being a woman affects my work, but *socially* it's hard sometimes."

Post-*Lasers...*, there's a new side project on the way called KoBi, and she's started an internet label, Bun-E "to release some tasty little EPs and compilations" (for free). Keeping up the day job at a charity, these days she might only get to party once a month, but she still loves acid. "Something about it makes me feel energised." Her own late take on the genre sounds so authentically old school that until recently forums were pondering exactly who was behind it – how does she feel about the posts headed 'Is-Syntheme-Aphex-Twin'?

"I am, can't you tell?"

www.syntheme.co.uk



blk jks

Words: Petra Davis

"I drowned into this," enthuses BLK JKS bassist Molefi Makananise. "I always knew I wanted to play stuff like this, even though I'm from an Afrojazz background, not a rock background at all. But this is beyond my expectations. This had to be, had to happen, had to exist."

Makananise is calling from New York, where, at the fabled Electric Ladyland studios, he and the remaining BLK JKS – lead vocalist Linda Buthelezi, guitarist Mpumi Mcata, and drummer Tshepang Ramoba – are recording their album, settling happily into the unaccustomed, dirty snow of an East Coast winter. Their current release, the 'Mystery' EP, produced by Brendan Curtis of Secret Machines,

'It's a cool thing to ignore cultural restrictions'

is their first release outside of South Africa; all four hail from East Rand in Johannesburg. The EP bristles dub, psych-rock, ska and mbaqanga – South Africa's Zulu blues tradition – in complex variegation. Unfamiliarity can account for some of the critical difficulty with the joyful, densely abstruse BLK JKS sound, but Makananise is unrepentant: "You could say we use a whole lot of artillery, in terms of materials, pedals, sound effects. But really what we do is let the songs reveal themselves to us. And it's amazing – that we keep progressing just that way."

For some of the people who are hearing your music now, their only exposure to South African music will be Paul Simon's *Graceland*.

"There's so much mbaqanga influence in *Graceland*. It's interesting, because mbaqanga

is now a South African trademark, but its pioneers, people like Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens, were using Western instruments and expanding on the 1-4-5 chord progression. So for Paul Simon to take mbaqanga out and expose this tradition to the world was important. It's a relationship."

There is an increasing number of younger Western musicians drawing very directly from African and Afro-Brazilian musics, in transactions sometimes painfully unequal. BLK JKS, together in various forms since 2000, self-releasing singles within the contained Johannesburg scene, first came to the attention of Western interests when they caught the eye of Favela enthusiast Diplo.

"Yeah, he was definitely looking out for an interesting band in South Africa. He wanted to sign us to Mad Decent, so he sent someone from the label over to help us develop. In the end we stayed independent a while longer."

"But I think it's honestly a cool thing to ignore cultural restrictions. You're not in a cage; the world is yours too. I would encourage artists from anywhere to view themselves as citizens of the universe, explore and incorporate traditions outside of their own cultures."

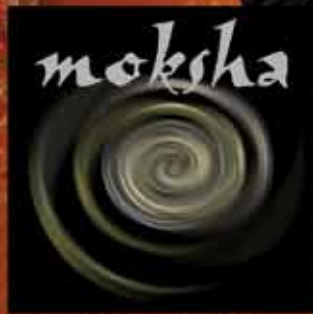
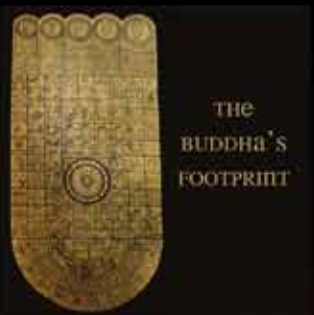
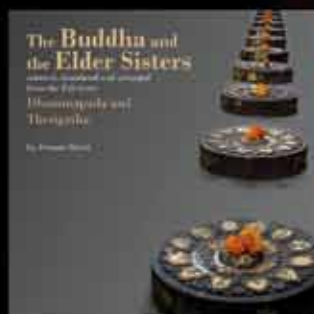
It's a generous attitude that speaks of genuine conviction. For decades, black South African musicians were stratified by appalling laws restricting integration of different tribal communities and cultural heritages; for many, the commingling of disparate techniques and traditions is itself radical. In December, BLK JKS played the Soweto Arts Festival for the second time.

"We love playing there. Because it happens in the hood, and because talented promoters put it together and brilliant South African musicians come and play there for the people of Soweto. It's growing every year, and now there are even some international visitors. In Soweto if they don't like you, they really let you know, but everyone went crazy. It was raining so hard and there were people dancing in the rain everywhere, shouting for more."

www.myspace.com/blkjks

h a r m o n o g r a p h

- PUSHING BOUNDARIES - ART - MUSIC - FILM - WORDS - CROSSING GENRES -





read the label: le vilain chien

Words: Jesse Darlin'

Presenting the first in a one-part guide to France's most pet-friendly, owner-confuzzling label

A quick digital bounce through the world of French indie purveyors Le Vilain Chien feels – and looks – like the dream projection of a sugar-tripping six-year-old at a birthday party: rainbow-coloured glucose/vomit burps, happy dancing friends, wilfully tuneless singalongs over musical chairs electrobeats, puppies and pussycats ("Cats and dogs are a lot of fun to us, especially when they're ugly") all come looming out of a void coloured in the bright blues and pinks of synthesised candy.

Graphic designer La Chenille, of Le Club des Chats, provides the signature pet art plus

'If they weren't our friends at first, they are now'

typography, and the artists produce their own cover graphics, in the spirit of DIY.

Le Vilain Chien, who also "take full charge of the tours, gigs, record releases and distribution", are part of a pan-European network of DIY and indie promoters, makers, doers and players. "The bands on our label hail from different parts of France and are very active locally," says Chenille. "Some have their own record label, or have released records on other labels, and often tour France or elsewhere in the world. Last year, we organised a European tour for BJ Snowden, who lives in the USA."



Although Le Chien claim no relation to the Antifolk scene, there are parallels in the Modus Operandi, ethos and aesthetic (although these guys have turned up the cute and badass bars to almost three times the volume).

The sound is appealingly gross and eccentric: "We are generally drawn to artists who have a unique musical approach, a personal style and a strong personality. We are fond of things that are both pop and disturbing, of unconventional musical practices. We like stuff that's gleeful, sincere and innovative. What do all our releases have in common? Maybe a certain kind of quiet madness inside all of them." Sometimes it's a quiet madness – Regis Victor, for example, are fairly polite and pretty in their weirdness – and sometimes it ain't; if you didn't think stoner noisecore, and puking Moog electrowooze could be cute, you should take in some Oso El Roto and find out.

Le Vilain Chien, in their own words, "function on a small scale, like a little family. We only put out records by people that we know and value" and many of their artists live right there in the same town. "If they weren't our friends at first, they are now."

The whole thing, indeed, gives the impression of a bunch of buddies having a wicked time together. And then, there are the parties: loosely part of the distribution and publicity strategy, but more for the pure joy of it, the "Unsound Festival" (Le Festival Bancal) looks like the best night, hands-down, for those sick of taking themselves and the music too seriously (or wishing to be transported back into their six-year-old selves). Have a browse through



the flyers (all artwork is online) and you'll wish you were there: far from being a po-faced showcase of the label's biggest hopes, the "very festive" parties offer games, such as the 'owl-drawing contest' (and frankly, who *doesn't* want to be at a party with an owl-drawing contest in play), balloons, "cheerful music playing in the background", and all manner of juicy delight.

"Our programming policy is akin to our record releasing policy; the entrance fee is not high and beer is cheap... What more can you ask for?"

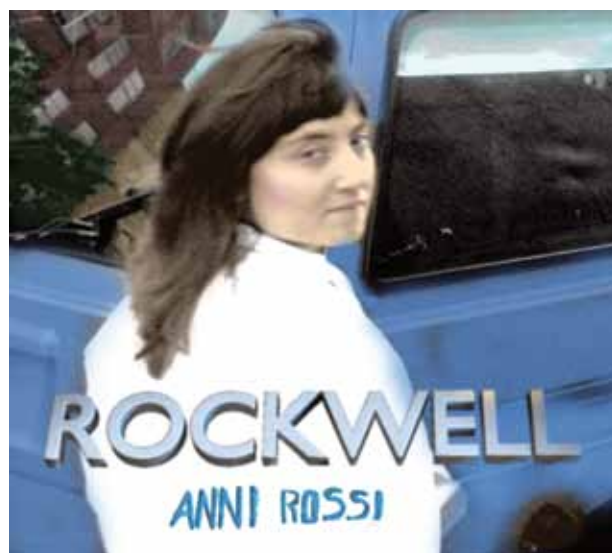
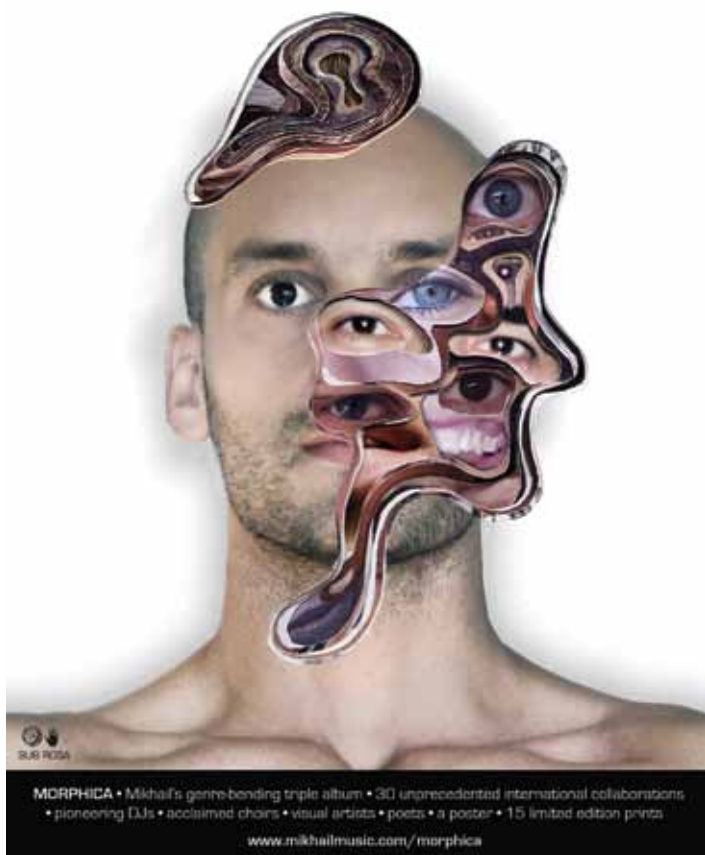
No big agenda, no heavy credos or caveats, synths instead of guitars, pleasure above politics. Call it Antipop. Call it what you like. It looks and sounds like the best fun around.

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NUMBER OUR DAYS

Words: Ben Jacobs

Illustration: Vincent Vanolli

Amiga enthusiast

Max Tundra makes friends and enemies on the road



Bowery Ballroom, New York

My first ever gig in this glorious city. It was ridiculously cold, something like -20 °C. Warmed up with incredible food at Vanessa's Dumpling House, where I recreated a favourite London meal. The NYC version was far superior. Tonight I supported The Rosebuds – with very different music from myself. I feared their fans wouldn't go for my stuff, but they even bought a couple of tins of Max Tundra soup.

Le Poisson Rouge, New York

Earlier that day I went to look at the Flatiron Building, which I had been obsessing over prior to my trip, then across the road to Shake Shack. I froze my hands off while scoffing a hot dog and a vanilla malt milkshake. The LPR show was

tremendously well received; I don't recall ever having such an enthusiastic reception (people were *screaming* between songs). It felt like people really respected what I was doing, in stark contrast to...

Crowdaddy, Dublin

Advice: Never play a gig if you are the special guest at a weekly student night specialising in Kaisers,

One guy was jabbing at my keyboards, while another was unplugging them

Killers and Kooks. This introduction to the Irish leg of my tour was quite the brisk slap to the chops. In actual fact, there were only about five people spoiling the evening, but each was as unpleasant as all the previous audience assholes I've ever encountered rolled into one. One guy was jabbing at my keyboards, another was unplugging them. A third grabbed the mic stand and used it to slam the mic into my mouth while I was singing. The last straw was when a punter showed me his mobile phone onto which he had typed 'Play something good'. The rest of the audience gave a cheer when I asked whether they thought I was already obeying the instruction. I then reminded the texter

the second room had a DJ playing very different music to mine and suggested he did the rest of us a favour and fucked off there.

Róisín Dubh, Galway

The promoter told me that James Blunt had played a gig at Róisín Dubh to 20 people, a month before releasing his No 1 album. I was delighted that my audience was nearly three times that, and wondered whether *Parallax Error Beheads You* might soon soar to the top. I bumped into an old friend of mine, and was surprised at the friendly nature of his conversation – last time we met he had handed me a letter, instructing me to read it once I got home. It contained a sequence of the most paranoid, dope-fuelled, hateful ramblings I had ever been handed. At some point, as so often through the years, he got the wrong end of the stick about something I said. I imagine I'll probably bump into him again next time I'm in Galway.

Pavilion, Cork

This gorgeous venue used to be a cinema, and some of the old Deco-esque flourishes are still in place. The Cork promoters were wonderful hosts. Support was Crayonsmith, friendly chaps who kindly offered to give me a lift to Belfast the next day in their van.

Out To Lunch Festival, Belfast

The van journey was most merry, and we exchanged many a quip about each other's aul wans. The Out To Lunch Festival must hold some serious sway in Belfast, as all of my albums were on prominent display in HMV. Leaving, I strolled along the high street and must have said "I wouldn't mind looking at the trainers in Office" a bit too loudly, as a youth surprised the hell out of me by being more helpful than any of the store employees. He followed me in and wandered around, showing me successively more outrageous footwear (silver quilted Nike boots – speeew) and suggesting that they'd "look lovely on me". I think he was just trying to impress his mates, but I was grateful for his elevation of my hitherto bigoted opinion of shellsuit-clad strangers.





Gig could have been more crowded, not least because someone from my past I didn't need to see was there, and there were less people to hide behind.

The Cavern, Exeter

In amongst tonight's crowd were three of my lovely old friends up from Cornwall and Plymouth, and much high-fivery and japes did ensue. This and the remaining tour dates were with my friend Joe who makes fantastic music under the moniker Ben Butler And Mouse Pad. We stayed at a most peculiar room in a motel which called itself a townhouse. We let ourselves in to be greeted by terse printed signs instructing guests to be 'out by 10am'; unwelcome after an already late night and half an hour navigating Exeter's labyrinthine one-way "systems" looking for the only spare parking space in Devon.

Clwb Ifor Bach, Cardiff

Hurled out onto the street after four hours' sleep, I typed Clwb Ifor Bach's postcode into the borrowed sat-nav and selected the relaxing preset Irish lilt of 'Sean' to ease ourselves up the M5 and M4. We were running super early, so took a diversion to Glastonbury Tor, for a stroll and some fresh air. Also, I wanted to put 'Sean' through his paces, and he did us proud, delivering us from unmarked country lanes unto Cardiff in less than an hour.

The Fleece, Bristol

Someone had mentioned that there was an eccentric vintage synth museum on the outskirts of Bristol. We arrived at EMIS, a musical instrument shop stocked with all manner of dazzling keyboards. Andy, the owner, said that he now has so many synths upstairs that they are stacked atop one another and it is now very difficult to get into the room, but he would be happy to bring out anything we cared to look at. This is the man with TWO Fairlights (albeit broken ones). I fell in love with a Korg Poly-61 and made a £200 impulse purchase. It featured in all the subsequent shows, and I was grateful for its warmth of tone and fatness of chord, although less so for its curious habit of dropping in the odd ghost note when I wasn't playing it. Usually these spurious bleeps were in the correct key, which spooked us out a bit. The Fleece was lovely, mainly thanks to the curly-haired man who dances at the front of all Bristol shows ever.

Cargo, London

I selected all the support bands for this event – BB&MP, Lidl Richard, Pete Um, G£nuin£ Guy and Silverlink. The coordinating of six acts, the first ever meeting of my new girlfriend and my mum, in a venue crowded to bursting with fans, old and new friends and tons of casual Old Street passers-by, was a logistical and physical headache, but delirious fun at the same time. Most people didn't know who the heck I was at the start, but one girl told me afterwards that she had been moved so much by my performance that she had been crying for much of my set, completely renewing my previously dented love of the general public.

Freebutt, Brighton

Last time I played this venue the support band was Snow Patrol. I thus predict great things for Ben Butler And Mouse Pad. I dedicated tonight's show to any of the audience who had failed to file their tax return by this evening's deadline, thus saddling themselves with a £100 fine. Stayed in a curious, dreamlike version of *Fawlty Towers*. The following morning I get thoroughly lost finding my way from my room back to reception. Drove Joe to Gatwick and grabbed myself a Wimpy moments later.



playlist: holy roar records

Words: Alex Fitzpatrick

Illustration: Adrian Fleet

Weekend Nachos

Prioritize

I went to Indianapolis Dufest last June, a small weekend festival organised by the righteous 'nude-punk grind kings' Phoenix Bodies. Weekend Nachos were a revelation – the vocalist sounds like a grumpy old man shitting his intestines out. This song has the best opening riff and breakdown ever and reminds me of people dressed up as robots stage-diving. It's available on Relapse's sweet *This Comp Kills Fascists Vol 1*.

Frankmusik

Done Done

OK – he is probably going to be huge this year with G-A-Y (if it still exists?!) and 13-year-old girls but Frankmusik has been kicking around for a couple of years now, bubbling away under the surface. This tune absolutely defined 2008 for me – in particular the summer. Put it on loud in your car with the windows down and try telling me there is a better beat and chorus for any situation.

Outputmessage

Glintz

I really feel this is an undiscovered gem. I may be wrong, I may just be operating in the wrong circles. Apparently he is just some science graduate who fancied his hand at electronic music. I can't decide if that makes him annoyingly talented, or shows up electronic music as being something anyone can do. Either way this song is what you *wish* Ibiza was like in your head, in a utopian way, where you can take your friends and erase all the idiots. It's also all about clichéd Londoner weekend trips to Brighton. In the summer. With fish and chips.

Holy State

Solid State Messiah (vs The Valve Viking)

I haven't been as excited by a British rock band since, oh, 2008. For a new band, they

are so accomplished it's scary. We finally have a band on these fair isles that can stand toe-to-toe with Fugazi, Hot Snakes and Jesus Lizard, and look them in the eye with pride.

The Now

The Now

This came out ages ago and featured members of Neil Perry and many other screamo luminaries. It's severely difficult to describe the impact the 57 seconds 'Is That Me, No It's The Other Guy With 20 Arms' had on my 19-year-old brain. Imagine a time in the past where moshing was about discordance, basement shows and good times rather than haircuts and hot merch.

The vocalist sounds like a grumpy old man shitting his intestines out

The Tony Danza Tapdance Extravaganza

Danza II: The Electric Boogaloo

Most stupid or best name ever? Regardless – this band have taken tech-metal/hardcore to an elaborate new level. I don't understand why these dudes aren't as revered as Dillinger Escape Plan and Meshuggah. The riffs are impossible, the timings alien, the vocalist sounds drunk. It all aligns for an experience that, once you are tuned in, is unrivalled in modern heavy music.

Swarm Of The Lotus Sward Of The Lotus

Let's be honest – Mastodon totally sucked after *Remission*. Swarm Of The Lotus, in a justified universe would have been 100 times bigger – as they were 100 times better. The biggest backline ever for a DIY/underground band, and even bigger riffs. Seek out this band, HAIL, pay your respects and dues.

Righteous punk imprint Holy Roar reissue Rolo Tomassi's debut EP later this month. www.holyroarrecords.com



guided tour: zu

Words: Adam Anonymous

These sax-wielding Italians play from the gut

Were you to capture the noise of several hundred tonnes of rock avalanching down the sides of Mount Etna, then channel the whole thing through seriously deranged saxophone, drums and bass, the results might almost approach the amorphous cacophony of Zu. Except the trio – Jacopo Battaglia (drums), Massimo Pupillo (bass) and Luca T Mai (sax) – are from Rome, not Sicily. The point, however, remains. Live, they're a quite incredible prospect: where breathtaking instrumental aptitude meets lung-puncturing brutality, and grooves that shoe you harder than boot-shaped Italy itself delivering a size nine to the breadbasket. Honing that attack since 1999, they hit a monolithic recorded stride on latest album *Carboniferous*, their debut for Ipecac and the first non-collaborative full-length Zu effort since 2002's *Igneous*. Although that latter claim is, technically, not 100 per cent true, most notably as Mike Patton, the head of their fresh label home and lord of all things noisy and a little manic, contributes his unmistakable tones to a brace of tracks. Patton's big-haired buddy King Buzzo from the Melvins slings guitar on 'Chthonian', with a handful of additional musical cameos elsewhere from Italian musicians. Semantics aside, Massimo takes us back to their *Carboniferous* period...

Ostia

A pummelling opening, bass spasms and militaristic drums colliding with glorious Lightning Bolt-level harmonics.

"The neighbourhood where we come from. A densely populated, ugly place on the seaside. The only thing that ever happened is that director Pier Paolo Pasolini was killed here. Lots of junkies. Lots of our friends from the squat scene were involved in the gabba scene at some point. This is for them."

'Music that really comes from our bowels'

Chthonian

Carboniferous's heaviest lurch features the scraping riff-craft of King Buzzo of Melvins, locking into beautifully ugly hypnotic doom-laden breakdowns...

"Chthonian is a Greek word for the underworld. Chthonic deities, as opposed to the Olympic ones, are linked to the instincts, life and death cycles, and vital force."

Carbon

Sax as played through the horn of a big rig truck and a hint of the passages when Rage Against The Machine approximate 'Kashmir'; the devil's work, naturally...

"The carbon atom consists of six neutrons, six electrons, six protons: 666. Because the carbon atom has only three active electron inertia levels, it is always subject to subatomic transitional death. Carbon is the main element in the structure of the 'known' universe. The planet earth and all life are made of carbon atoms. This is why everything is subject to sickness, death, and decomposition."

Beata Viscera

Dizzying drum clicks and thuds give way to squealing sax and a build-up of pure sense-arresting drama...

"The title comes from a renaissance madrigal, and it talks of the blessed belly of Virgin Mary. In our case, of blissful bowels. Playing music that really comes from our bowels, and living a life with guts."

Erinys

See 'Beata Viscera', only with harder drums and infinite broken bass strings...

"Again, Greek mythology: the three Furies. In a certain way, they are a personification of karma, of paying for one's actions. The classic theme of guilt and punishment."

Soulympics

Mike Patton's first appearance, creepy keyboards beneath vocals seemingly projected through copper piping, slipping into half-vomited Tomahawk-fashion narratives as Zu clunk ominously around him...

"Mike's vocals; his words and his title. He was watching the Olympics last summer, so it talks of Olympics of the soul!"

Axion

Floor toms and kick drums straight from the Earth's core, rudely interrupted with frantic freeform madness, dwindling to oddly alluring sax...

"Scientists all over the world are attempting to discover what particles make up dark energy and matter. Recent theories say that 95 per cent of the universe is actually 'hidden' – dark. According to scientist William Wester, axions are one of the theoretical particles under consideration. And at the same time, 95 per cent of human DNA is still considered by orthodox scientists 'junk DNA', but it only means that they don't have a clue of what we are made of."

Mimosa Hostilis

Super-amplified reed vibrations and, fittingly, a definite mind-melting atmosphere...

"This scientist Rick Strassman speaks of DMT [the potent psychedelic drug dimethyltryptamine] as 'the spirit molecule', because it activates the visionary side of the brain. The funny thing is that this molecule is found everywhere: humans, animal, plants... yet it's considered illegal! Mimosa Hostilis is a plant that contains a lot of DMT – that's why it is sacred in Brazilian Amazon, under the name Jurema."

Obsidian

What begins as a potential interlude from the exhausting attack soon reveals its true colours...

"Obsidian is a beautiful black stone. The first wars were fought with obsidian weapons. WI Thompson likens the obsidian to 'A dark, chthonic milk which flowed out of the breast of the volcano'. Obsidian was considered a sacred material charged with 'mana', the power of the Goddess."

Orc

Patton part two, and inarguably his superior cameo, throat singing chants over buzzing guttural bass drones that climaxes in hellish fashion; genuinely unsettling...

"Orc comes from latin, where 'orcus' means hell. Underworld again."

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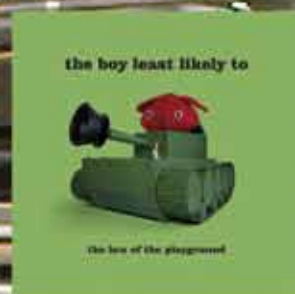
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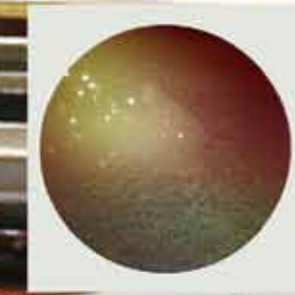
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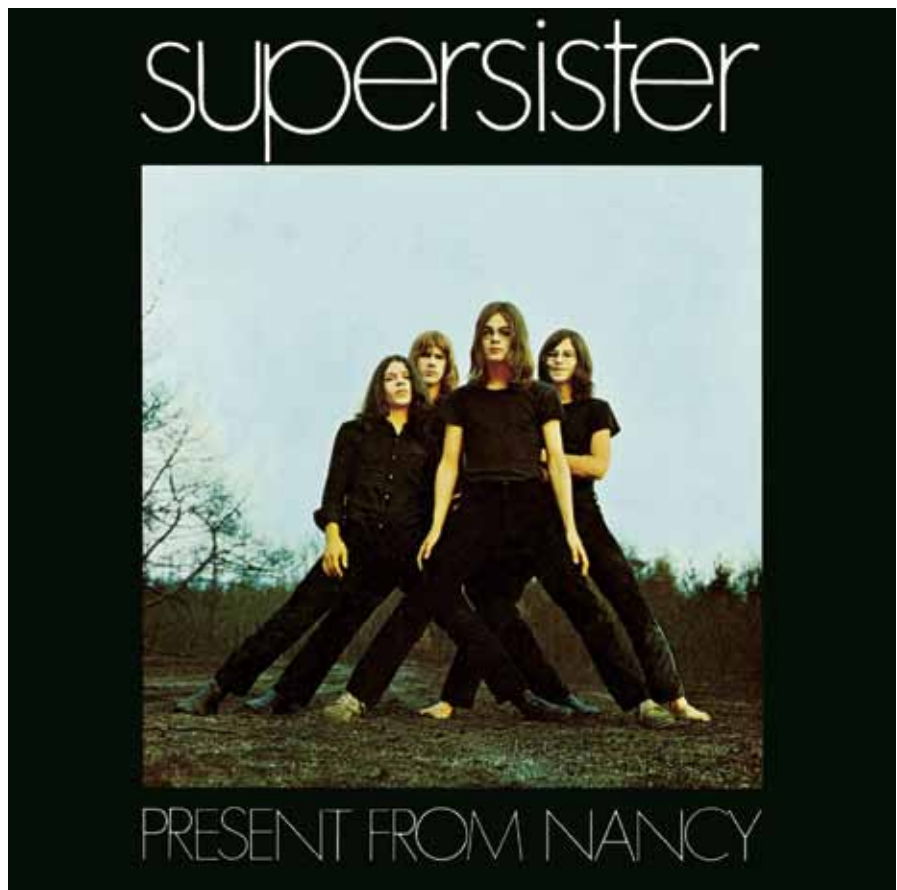
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music that time forgot: supersister

Words: Greg Weeks

The Espers bandleader recalls some forgotten heroes of the European counterculture

The Seventies saw thousands of bands from mainland Europe explode across the global counterculture. Today, stylistic monikers like Krautrock, Rock In Opposition, progressive, symphonic, folk and acid rock often overshadow the names of the individual participants, but the latter live on in many of today's most important – and sometimes, equally unknown – musicians. It's common knowledge among aficionados that the continent's rock fizzled out along with the peace and love generation, leaving England and America to reclaim the throne. As with any era, bands of equal importance found vastly varying degrees of success, yet time (read: changing tastes) quickly obscured cult and arena acts alike, leaving to the CD reissue the task of re-introducing the decade as a more or less unified strata from which to patiently mine gems and re-evaluate hierarchies.

One of mainland Europe's shiniest diamonds was Dutch act Supersister. They were not the most successful rock band from the Netherlands – that honour likely rests on the shoulders of Golden Earring or Earth And Fire. But Supersister garnered a reputation through a string of festival performances and a major label contract that spanned five albums. That they fell out of favour by the Eighties is no surprise, given that the music they are most associated with – Soft Machine-style Canterbury jazz rock and Zappa-esque fusions of angular rock and humour – likewise fell out of favour.

Supersister formed in the late Sixties as a high school band called Super OK Sister. Soon after, their original lead singer dropped out and left keyboardist and general musical savant Robert Jan Stips to voice for the band. They were still teenagers when they

forged their epic and accomplished debut *Present From Nancy*, a quartet of Stips on keys, Ron van Eck on bass, Marco Vrolijk on drums and Sacha van Geest on flute. It was dynamic and visceral jazz-infused rock that, sans electric guitar, contained passages heavy enough to obliterate the dingiest sonics of their contemporaries.

It's likely their humour stemmed as much from

acting more or less seriously. They struggled through line-up alterations, and voyaged deep into instrumental jazz-rock territory (perhaps too deep). And, while bands today seem to last ten years and produce three or four albums with less difficulty, it was the Sixties/Seventies tradition to release five or six in half that time and then make like the Groundhogs and split, which is pretty much the way

it went for Supersister.

As exceptional as the quartet were in their salad days, their lack of international attention resurfaced in the Nineties as full-blown disrespect, the band suffering the ignominious fate of

The continent's rock fizzled along with the peace and love generation's momentum

their youth as a love for Zappa's late-Sixties offerings, and what sets their dark comedy apart is Stips' lyrics. His humour, both cutting and whimsical, reached its apex with 'The Groupies In The Band', a psychedelic mélange that comments on countercultural excess with a wit that rings true to this day. Elsewhere, the melancholic 'No Tree Will Grow (On Too High A Mountain)' finds increasing relevance in its warning of self-destruction via individual isolation. It opens with one of the most succinct and thought-provoking lyrics in history: "Life is no good friend, good friendship never ends," a line even more staggering given that it was written and sung in the maker's second language.

The band would ultimately land a Polydor deal, and five albums tracing their path from serious musicians having serious fun to serious musicians

the 2-fer reissue, great for cash strapped music freaks but devastating for the band's album art and sequencing. It seems that the appearance of one of the band's earliest singles, 'She Was Naked', in the Joy Division biopic *Control* spurred renewed interest in the band who, by this time, had reformed to tour the Progfest scene in LA. The untimely demise of van Geest appeared to put an official end to the band's renewed activities, but a forthcoming sold-out performance at NEARfest 2009 in Bethlehem, PA trumps the declaration. Perhaps they came to feel that the best way of honouring a fallen comrade was to keep his music in the ears of those who need to experience it. Whatever, I'm happy to have them back, and that their discs have been properly re-issued by Cherry Red imprint Esoteric with tremendous loving care. Please do check them out.

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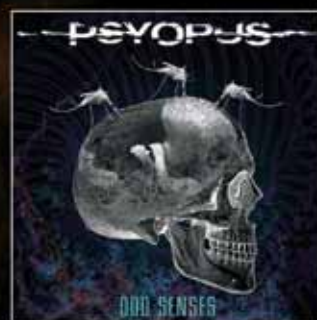
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Illustrations: **Sac Magique**

Where *Plan B* writers knock heads to new sounds for your edutainment

Morton Valence

Falling Down The Stairs (Bastard)

Those still with venture capital to splash gesturally should know they can invest in Morton Valence's forthcoming album – scan contracts at their website.

Emily: Falling down the stairs of 1989!
Kick: Their first single was twee as hell and about sailors, sailing. It was so ultra-pop, it made me think they might shade into subversive... I'm kind of rethinking that.
Lauren: Every time I hear a Morton Valence song it has absolutely no relation to any other song of theirs I've heard before.
Maybe I just have a terrible memory...?
Kick: It's an 'electronic fairy tale' apparently. Could do with more goblins.
Emily: There's no story at all here, and actually this is now like un-fun, Mogadon Roxette.

Anna-Marie: Sixth-form bassline. Like my attempts to 'Teach Yourself Guitar' aged 16.
Lauren: The music itself is hemmed in by her unbothered vocals. It's itching to get started, but she's so bored and apathetic over the top that it can't... take off.

Moon Unit

Connections (DFA/Supersoul)

One must assume they're named after Frank Zappa's daughter, responsible for popularising Valley Girl speak, and therefore, like, wow, total culture hero.

Kick: The press seem to be convinced electro is going to be the big thing this year (again). I just can't see it...
Anna-Marie: Can't tell if that's a girl or a guy singing, Hercules And Love Affair-style... think it's a gal.
Lauren: And she's trying too hard to sound ominous: "Hearts bleeding, fists beating, no understanding", done in this semi-siren ambiguous hum. But it's actually nowhere

near frightening enough. My favourite electro is the stuff that makes me want to poo myself.

Emily: Do none of today's songs have a chorus? The satellite pulseback bassline is nice, tho...

Kick: I think it's a builder, but her job is to ignore all that. I don't hate, but it doesn't threaten etiquette, could last a really long time.

Anna-Marie: That harmony was pretty sweet. Otherwise flat disco vocals, no soul. I can't explain the whole spacedisco revival.
Lauren: The song is called 'Connections', yet it's so emotionless...? Surely they must know how vapid they sound. Maybe it's done ironically.

Kasms

Bone You (Trouble)

One ex-Test Icicle plus friends. Uniquely ill-spelt names rule Google.

Kick: Grinding histrionics. One of my favourite hip-hop headfucks is when Diddy says, "Madd women wantin' to bone Sean Combs" – a) they're 'mad(d)' b) Hehehe.

Emily: Welcome to the that scene in your favourite LA-teen-vampire-punk film. Everyone's drinking Mad Dog at the beach and they've set all the trash cans on fire, there are lots of neon zebra bikinis and the cops will show up in approximately 57 seconds.

Lauren: Snotty-gal pop-punk...? Like Moon Unit, this is not scary enough. I demand to be putrified with fear please.
Anna-Marie: Lightspeed Champ's gone country. The others have gone to Camden.
Lauren: Red and black striped tights, heavy kohl, pale wrist clamped with chunky plastic bracelets (hearts, stars, letters spelling out names), lots of silver rings. I know, 'cause I used to (try to) be one.



thecocknbulldid

I'm Not Sorry/There's A Mother In Our Bed (Moshi Moshi)

Whereas searching for this UK soloist on her second single can provide instant life lessons regarding hanky codes, basket parties and vampire runs.

Anna-Marie: Oh yes! East London charity shop keyboards! This is more like it... rubbish drum machines kick in...

Emily: Now *this* is a song that builds...

Kick: Like Little Boots, it's good to hear someone doing Girls Aloud on a budget.

Emily: No, the synths are better and there are minor keys. What are those drums? Typewriter bongo hybrids? And a sneaky 808 attack?

Anna-Marie: I have to confess, she's someone whose name I've seen on flyers and thought 'fluorescent scene rapper chick', but this is way better than that. Well slick!

Lauren: The B-side is very MIA. Those nonplussed, multi-tracked vox, mantra-like, disinterested; that fffshhwhwwwapppp bass (I'm so articulate).

Emily: Chantable as hell. How many remixes do you think we'll see by summer? So many drum, handclap and droney parts to slice up.
Kick: Pretty soft-edged, but more unbothered about coolness than kitting up for success. And, yeah, the disparity between even the two tracks on this single suggests she's packing plenty of facets.

Casiokids

Fot I Hose/Verdens Storste Land (Moshi Moshi)

From Bergen, in Norway. Casio itself began in Tokyo. Its first product was a ring that held a cigarette, "allowing the wearer to smoke the cigarette down to its nub while also leaving the wearer's hands free". Hail

Emily: The start of this sounds like if some fat furry muppets with nozzles for noses were

honking away and wiggling their bushy eyebrows while squatting up and down.

Kick: Muppets...squatting? In an anarcho-syndicalist way?

Emily: No – and not in a rude way, either... just up and down, rhythmic-like.

Kick: I'm always cheered to hear arrangements that may involve all concerned sticking a tongue out the corner of their mouth.

Emily: Someone choking a small animal in the background – or frottaging a balloon!

Lauren: Emily said 'frottaging', arrrrh! Kick, do I overtake you as the *Plan B* resident prude? Rude words make me cry.

Anna-Marie: I'd like to hear some shouty Late Of The Pier/indie-cool boy vocals over this.

Kick: Yeah, I guess the one thing it never does is focus the cleverness or the energy in one place..?

Emmy The Great

First Love (Close Harbour)

She's been an official one to watch so long she's probably given a strata of sensitive kids eyestrain, but the album is coming! Promise! Probably!

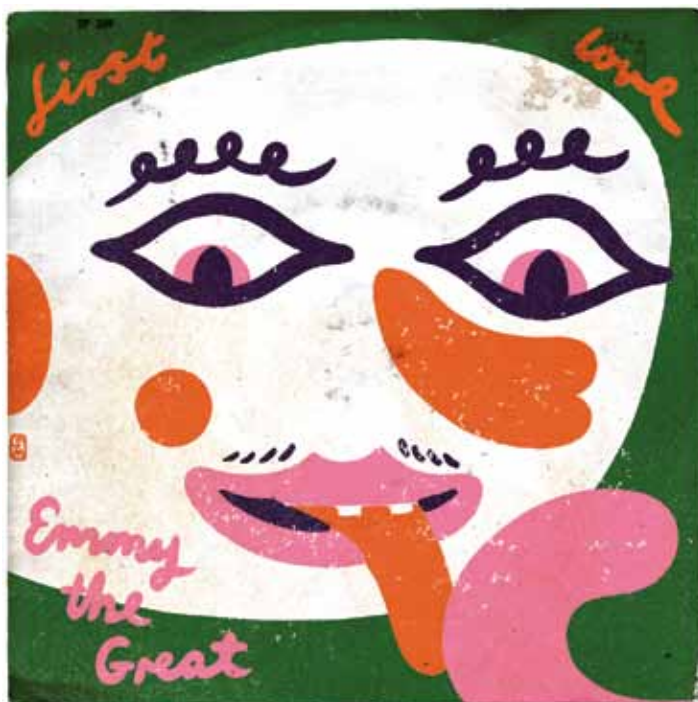
Kick: Wow. Borrowed plot of Sam Beckett's *First Love*. Hm. That is a high-stakes game to play. Does anyone know what Beckett dug, musically? I do not think he would jig.

Lauren: He would walk around in circles. Over and over again, with an overwhelming sensation of despair and the inability to ever stop walking around in circles.

Kick: Also references Leonard Cohen. Bad timing. Everyone saying, "Oh yeah, it's got a bit from that X-Factor No 1 on it".

Anna-Marie: Controversial – wonder if she auditioned ever.

Lauren: It's been much written-about that she's got this quite caustic way with words; into some fluffy scenario she'll pop a picture



Could do with more goblins

of brains splattered onto the windscreen or something ('MIA'). But it's true. Kick: On the down side, she's cursed. . . what could she have done to offend the fates so? OH WAIT: EMMY THE GREAT! HUBRIS! Lauren: I like that she's not afraid to be teenagery. Why not? The experiences that most shape us are probably the ones we look back on as being sickly and sweet and typical. But that's why they were special, 'cause you never do it again. And this song might be sugary and twinkly and nostalgic, but that's what first love is like! I WIN.

Shuttle

Tunnel/Bad Guts (Ninja Tune)

UK label seeks US producer for warm sulks, three-waying with Cadence Weapon for the flip.

Kick: I recently reclassified 'wonky' as 'funstep'. This isn't funstep. It's more. . . glumstep.

Lauren: I could eat the whop-whop bass for dinner. Fwopstep. This is one of the best things I've heard in ages.

Kick: Imagine if they actually did pump this through the tube's public speakers.

Emily: People would jump. However, I like this. That skippy-thud drum is the sound of a person under a train. Peraltatic.

Kick: Backing vocals so treated they don't sound human anymore. Chimpunk rave meets paranoid urban bass.

Emily: I like that the sample is all about pain and it's this awful queasy squeal.

Lauren: The bass is like bullets when it stutters. I feel castigated by the chorus: "You didn't try hard enough". The melody is pretty 'Yay!', but then that bit comes in and he's all 'But you're RUBBISH'.

Anna-Marie: You've got to love that throwaway acid-house-hardcore. All cheap and nasty like a hit of poppers. Messy.

The Invisible

London Girl (Accidental)

Matthew Herbert's label, plus his production. Comes in visible physical formats, for convenience.

Emily: Reminds me of The Neptunes. . . it's the shifty smooooothness.

Kick: It's a slow lope. Sumptuous, even.

Lauren: I'd say more. . . flumpy. Like; 'Hey, look at my heartstoppingly-expensive sofa, aren't these cushions just so huge and cloudlike you could lose yourself in them while gazing at your reflection in the glass coffee table? In fact, my coffee table is so damn fine I think about humping it sometimes'.

Kick: (Changing subject) Maybe the bits aside from the smoooooth groooooove are too pretty. The Neptunes would have some noise like a car changing gears incorrectly, or a UFO cattle mutilation.

Emily: And there are lots of little plucky parts sprinkled on top and woven through. Lauren: Listen to the bass. It's basically 'Another One Bites The Dust'. Dun!

Dun! Dun! This is sleazy, but half-assed.

And if there's anything I don't like, it's a half-assed sleaze.

Anna-Marie: I was so hopeful. I don't think there are enough songs about London girls – it's all New York this and Paris that. This won't be putting us on the map though – way too loungecore.

Esser

Let's Work It Out (Transgressive)

Signed yr not ungrateful Void editor up to his fan club unasked. ID number is 10 digits, which suggests a fanbase dwarfing millennial cults or small corporations.

Kick: I have mixed feelings about Esser.

But he's a pop star, for sure.

Anna-Marie: Is that eight seconds of a Timbaland/Justin collab at the start? If only.

This could be Jamie T (there's his accent) at a bad disco (sounds like diluted Just Jack radio fodder).

Kick: I think he has a lot of ideas. I don't think he's trying to do things the easy way – although my favourite bits are the tangents and breakdowns.

Emily: No – the B-side sounds like a souped up version of one late Blur or Damon Albarn song. Yes, that's what it is. And the A-side sounded like it took some chords from 'World Of Water' by New Musik.

Oh, I'm getting old. . . everything sounds like something else. . .

Anna-Marie: Cute shimmery disco bits threaten to dance through. . . but don't. He's way too earnest for a young wannabe pop 'un, zzz, sorry!

Esiotrot

Tammy Is Lez (Sounds eXperience)

A band bamed after a Roald Dahl book (unless that's some stellar coinkidink). Anagram of what shelled reptile? (No prize).

Kick: It's funny that horns in funk are really sensual instruments, but in indie they're. . . not so much.

Emily: Advert-tastic. . . it's the sound of the quirky, caring broadband/phone/insurance company.

Anna-Marie: So far so twee. Makes me think of animated pre-Eighties kids' TV shows *Made In England*.

Lauren: It is exactly Los Campesinos! He's got the same accent! He's talking about going for a drive and photographs! He's even doing a call-and-response with himself!

Kick: Sounds classic, but. . . I'm jonesing for some twists, or perversions; some mistakes, even.

Emily: Agreed – and the xylophone ain't enough of a randomiser.

Speech Debelles

The Key (Big Dada)

This fresh UK rapper has a tattoo of musical notation around her wrist. Jingle? Check her YouTube channel – SpeechDebellesTV – for an introductory video. . . or wait for the album in May.

Lauren: This is the first time I have heard a clarinet in this kind of context. It's singing right out, as well, not skronking or stammering like the sax, which makes for a satisfying textural contrast. In fact, this whole thing is a good patchwork of differing intents/executions.

Kick: And without the cheesier hooks, I'd expect. It just kind of rises and falls. And she's very self-assured – the flow is so consistent and confident that you forget the effort it must take.

Anna-Marie: This falls (just) on the right of a public service broadcast. It's conscious hipjazz. She sounds super-classy.

Emily: Skippy! And how does she breathe?

Lauren: They should play this song when kids have to choose an instrument to play and drag their graffiti'd rucksacks along to the music room thinking how they'd rather it was flu-immunisation day.

Anna-Marie: I could totally imagine her on the bill at Book Slam or Latitude charming urban literary types – and that's not necessarily a bad thing! No wonder that Lily Allen's constantly wracked with fear and self-doubt in West London when there are girls like this out there.

singles of the month

Emily and Lauren: Shuttle 'Tunnel'/'Bad Guts'

Anna-Marie and Kick: thecocknbulldid 'I Might Be Wrong'/'There's A Mother In Our Bed'

when we meet

Words: **Ringo P Stacey** and **kicking_k**

Presenting new bands,
new hooks to get stuck in
yr quivering forebrain

The Bumblebees

How cute is too cute? How nice is too nice? These are serious ethical questions asked by the three social scientists (combined age: 61) named after nature's tidiest hivers. The questions are phrased as lo-fi indie pop – voice, guitar and synth songs classified as solids ('My Kaleidoscope'), liquids ('Internal World') or gas ('Fluffy Clouds Of Joy'). The songs are composed from the inside of brightly-coloured children's rides, for empiric reasons.

www.myspace.com/thebumblebeesinfestya

Curren\$y

The message rings hard from his portal: "CURREN\$Y DOES NOT WORK WELL WITH SUKAZ". Something hints it's a lesson that's been hard learned. Once signed to Lil' Wayne's vanity label Young Money – appropriate given his superficial likeness to former Hot Boy BG, slurring boasts and confessions in an amiable if slightly sinister drawl. One hit ('Where Da Cash At?') and a shelved album later he left in 2007 and his work's been in rude health since. Of 2008's seven mixtapes the one you need is concluding redux *Fin*, proof that he emulated Wayne's lyricism as much as his productivity.

www.myspace.com/flyspitta

Sharp humanity, populist spirit and endearingly ropey singing

The XX

Now that the post-Libs, pro-*Skins* crockney-troubadour-indie boom is belching its fetid last, this deluxe four-pack is amongst the most promising strays amassing from LDN's hinterland. Tidal sway, warm shadow, heavy romance – that their self-declared influences include long-loved *Plan B* staples like Tracy + The Plastics, Chromatics and Aaliyah is of less importance than the silk of their own sound.

www.myspace.com/thexx



Janelle Monáe

Facebook friends with the vestigial flesh appendage behind yr Void editor's avatar had to endure his posting this OutKast protege's video, plus seven consecutive comments, each CAPSier than the last and culminating in: "SHE DOESN'T ANSWER EMAILS – she's too busy pretending to be a robot and perfecting ways to undermine yr consensus reality via the medium of Cab-Calloway-James-Brown dance paradoxes". See the 'Many Moons' video and understand why he then invoked pathos. www.jmonae.com



Jyager

This is what happens when an 18-year-old bilingual Londoner (via Portugal) rejects grime to cram instead with Outkast's Aquemini, friends who do sex rhymes, and lashings of religious guilt. Earnest, and as intense as you'd expect from label YNR, also home to Jehst. Check the free mixtape for a document of potential. Check debut album *Encrypted Scriptures* next month for the fulfilment, his fevered bars coralled into compulsive testimony by Cee Why's cosy and corrosive beats.

www.myspace.com/jyagermak

Desperado

It seems only recently that grime has accepted its name. And not happily; Jammer's still sore on it not being Eski and you'd bet Dizzee sometime convinced himself it's really hip-hop. Enter centrestage, Desperado, alumnus of South Souldiers and OGs, unlikely resurrector of the inspired variation gryhme, last heard from the mouth of Dizz in 2004. The mix, *Gryhme Bangers*, is an equally inspired return to core values, economical rhymes, minimal beats that bang hard, and evidence (in the 'Roll Girl' remix) that electro isn't the only route to grime-pop nirvana. www.myspace.com/desperado0001

The Mojo Fins

Radio-friendly and well-adjusted, there's something of early REM about their long-choreographed jangle, thankfully just too shy to insinuate its anthemic tendencies anywhere unwanted. Gentle hearts thrum against delicate cartilage, soundtracky tracks sound hi-polish, somehow familiar; made from secret notes, maybe. www.themojofins.co.uk

Talk Normal

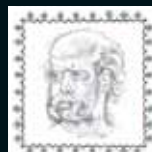
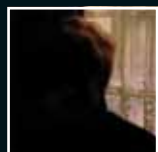
Like copping a face of black marble and pwned, red blood. Guitars like baby-goo, drums blind dancing and arrangements which shed their own skin. The *Plan B* home entertainment dept demand you fill the room with the duo's illibent heaviness like insecticide next time you're anti-socialising. www.myspace.com/talknormaltalknormal

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history from below: funky

Words: **Ben Mechen**

Geeneus photo: **Shaun Bloodworth**

KIG

In which we dispatch a scene sleuth to investigate a rising tide of urban positivity



The Rinse FM schedule, according to station figurehead Geeneus, is “not taken lightly”; look at the PDF and it’s a *Tetris* stack of two-hour blocks – packed tight, no gaps – gridding out the UK underground in the tangiest colours. The key gives grime a chromium blue, old skool garage a real springy green. Dubstep is a deep Happy Shopper orange. ‘Funky house’, ‘funky’, ‘UK funky’, or, as Rinse are calling it, ‘house *and* funky’ is coral pink.

Pirates like Rinse are respirators, and they have been oxygenating the bass, beats and bleeps of British dance music for over 20 years, rave through to jungle, garage through to grime to dubstep. Respiration allows life, movement, so in return, the bass, beats and bleeps have evolved and devolved, stretched inwards and outwards, stripped things back to nothing or piled it all in, re-emerging with particles re-arranged. So when Geeneus says that Rinse is “constantly changing,” he’s talking about the entire gaseous exchange that’s always been at the heart of UK dance, airwaves and sounds existing for and because of each other. That means that whichever colour springs out first from the schedule, that’s Rinse giving you the sound of now, the sound, says Geeneus again, of “the bottom underground”, of “the darkest and dungiest clubs”. It’s Rinse giving you the roots of tomorrow.

And in February 2009 there is a *lot* of coral pink.

Funky, then, has grown up quickly. Two years ago, it barely existed as something in its own right, yet today it’s flirting with national playlists and major labels. KIG’s ‘Heads, Shoulders, Knees And Toes’ has gone viral, with approaching a million YouTube hits. Island just signed it for big money; it’s released

later this month. So while it’s true that funky’s *pre*-history is rich, distinguished, and pretty damn close to Jurassic – it begins with classic house music 25 years old – you’ve got to remember that pre-histories have never been the same as a full fare. House is like chlorophyll in 4/4 time; it’s made almost every shoot of dance music that has broken surface since green. But saying that funky began with house is like saying that jazz began with a field holler.

Funky’s actual *history*, then, is house’s bones being twisted, being fitted up with new gear, its ribcage stuffed with tribal rhythms plundered from soca, the synths and shoebox symphonies of grime, and that low-end thickness UK dance always returns to. It’s a history which producer Roska describes as “the UK putting our own spin on things.” Robin Howells, who runs a funky and bassline night in Dalston called Wifey, meanwhile, calls it UK dance’s usual “alchemy; taking American music and injecting a different attitude, maybe drug culture, our Caribbean heritage, and then using pirate radio and dubplate culture to grow and mutate it.”

And this history is short – two years, three at most – with developments relayed synapse-sharp; a new plate gets smashed on air or in the dance and within a week a dozen producers are taking it apart and tweaking the mechanics, bedroom DJs are ripping tracks from imeem streams and zipping them back up as mixes, new dances with new names are spreading through the capital, old dances with old names are getting themselves a funky room, and the biggest DJs are getting booked to play both on the same night. It’s working across any networks it can – labels and distributors in the real world are going under by the week, so link-ups are

being made through MySpace top friend lists and shout-outs on radio or iTunes; sound is getting out through VIP refixes emailed to top DJs, or through downloads from start-up distros like ukfunky.com.

These are networks of necessity, unwieldy and uneven to start with, but jury-rigged into usefulness. Only a minority of artists, like Geeneus, can still get hard copies of their releases out to HMV. But for everyone else, say Ill Blu, a production duo whose track ‘Frontline’ with singer Princess has become a staple over the last month or two, “it’s a grind to get the music out there. It’s really still at the DIY stage right now.” They, like others, are starting up their own label, rather than waiting for anyone else.

“If you were making music 20 years ago,” says Geeneus, “You’d have been thinking of the money at the end of it. But a kid these days will never have had any experience of making money from music. They’ve got no idea there’s money in it.” They do it because they want to. Only seven years ago he was making hundred grand videos with proto-grime unit Pay As U Go Cartel. Now no one does that. “This is a holiday for me,” he claims. As with the kids, funky is just tunes and no bullshit.

With this in mind, how is that funky has managed to light such a rocket up things? A case in point; over the last year, Geeneus has been instrumental in bringing funky DJs into FWD, a club synonymous with dubstep. “People were like ‘what are you playing house for? This is a dubstep rave’. Now they’re after me for my playlist.” Put simply, funky is switching up events like FWD because it makes you *move*. “Funky is that feel good music, that party-starter,” say Ill Blu. “It’s got the energy, the excitement. It puts the funk in everybody.”



Kiss FM DJ Pioneer agrees; for him the vibe is “like garage all over again,” that restless search for more ways to contort yourself to sound, that impulse to dress fresh and smile. It’s brought females back to the rave – Geeneus reckons that at a funky night, eighty per cent of the crowd are ladies. Compare *that* to Sidewinder. And, the logic goes, where the girls lead, the boys will follow, and where the girls are, the boys will behave. Late last year, Boy Better Know had a chorus that went “*we need some more girls in here/there’s too many mans, too many many mans*”. Funky is beginning to seem like some kind of answer.

Nights like Wifey have sprung up too, drawing a mixed crowd, students stepping with kids from what Geeneus calls the “deep ghetto”. Then there’s the dozens of nights going on in Brixton, Bow, Streatham, Bedford. It’s at these that Geeneus will “just go and stand in the corner. There’ll be people smoking weed with their hoods up and they won’t care.” But at all these events, wherever they are and whoever is there, the release is through dancing. Dark garage, grime, and dubstep all blackened things up, privileged introspection, tension, dread. Those aren’t dancing feelings; you surrendered to something when you listened to them, but not to straight rhythm and propulsion, not to that connection to everybody else in the room, all of you with heartbeats anchored to the kick drum’s thump.

Funky, then, has the underground in one palm because with the other it’s putting the veil on several years of head nodding rather than body shaking. But a problem seems to arise here, because grime and dubstep have been leading UK dance music

for several years now, so any reaction against them, if funky really is that, must therefore be a battering administered with their own tools; as Geeneus points out, “grime kids are making funky now. And these are kids who didn’t listen to any music before grime.” So there are occasional tensions. Institutions like the Circle crew have been making soulful British house for years, unbothered by

Funky’s history is house’s bones being twisted

anyone, and their take on things is closer to that of US stalwarts like Dennis Ferrer or MAW. Yet the ‘funky’ tag has, unwittingly, swept them up too.

Meanwhile, that new generation of producers saw in raw and densely percussive workouts like Apple’s ‘Mr Bean’ all of grime’s clatter and force, but laid over an infectious beat, and so it’s unsurprising that they’ve ended up making something very different; listen to Lil Silva or a Marcus Nasty set to see why some bloggers have called funky ‘grime-in-disguise’, or why Tim Westwood has been using Hard House Banton’s ‘Sirens’ as a riddim on his 1Xtra show. At times, neither camp seems that comfortable alongside the other, and there has been the odd spat; the house purists, for instance, have accused the new kids of presumption to a heritage they don’t understand, of disowning that

pre-history I mentioned. But thankfully, more and more, this stuff is looking like small change.

Howells is philosophical on the implications; “even the polarisation that goes with funky is good...compare it to speed garage, bassline, dubstep; the ridicule they’ve all experienced at some point seems like an indicator of something good, and it drove things forward.” Also, perhaps because funky is too young and unsure of itself to pronounce on orthodoxy, or even because, as Geeneus contends, “funky represents a community more than a sound,” these tensions have not become open fissures. Both sides seem largely happy to share the same bills, slip into the same mixes, to let their successes reflect on each other. And holding things together are the majority who enjoy playing and making both styles, and splicing them together; Geeneus is one, and his labelling of the sound as “house and funky” seems a compromise agreeable to all, but there’s also NG, MA1, Naughty, Crazy Cousinz, and, day by day, countless more.

Funky is clearly healthy right now. As recently as last summer, most mixes featured the same tracks week on week. Simply not enough funky had been made yet. Demand was outgunning supply. But now, only the best tunes get second spins. Remix work for major R&B and house stars is flowing in, and A&Rs are circling. 2009 is shaping up nicely. But never underestimate just how fast that “bottom underground” goes. That’s how we got here anyway, isn’t it? Don’t ever expect it to stop peeling new skins for itself. “We’ve got to keep it moving,” concludes Geeneus. “Things change everyday. Funky is the same. I’ll see you in a year’s time and we’ll be talking about something else.”



jeremy jay

Words: Alex Goffey

Jeremy Jay just wasn't made for these times. His good bone structure and long, lanky figure call forth Robert Forster circa *Send Me A Lullaby*, while his hollowed surf guitar lines and supine American drawl could make any modern filly wish she was a wallflower at a Fifties dance. Like a doomed motorcycle rebel heading for a crash straight out of the Shangri-La's songbook, Jeremy Jay will break your heart – and maybe your mother's as well.

"I don't mind being a teen idol," Jay says. He is in Paris, a city he calls home alongside his native Los Angeles. Soon, he'll make his way across almost every city in Europe before jumping over the Atlantic to play just about every bedroom and disco in America, fluttering hearts with songs from second LP, *Slow Dance*, out now on K Records.

Last year's *A Place Where We Could Go* introduced his love for Buddy Holly and French New Wave, living in Hollywood and dreaming of the Left Bank. You can just tell that the only girls good enough for him would be Anna Karina or Jean Seberg. It's lust in the movies all over.

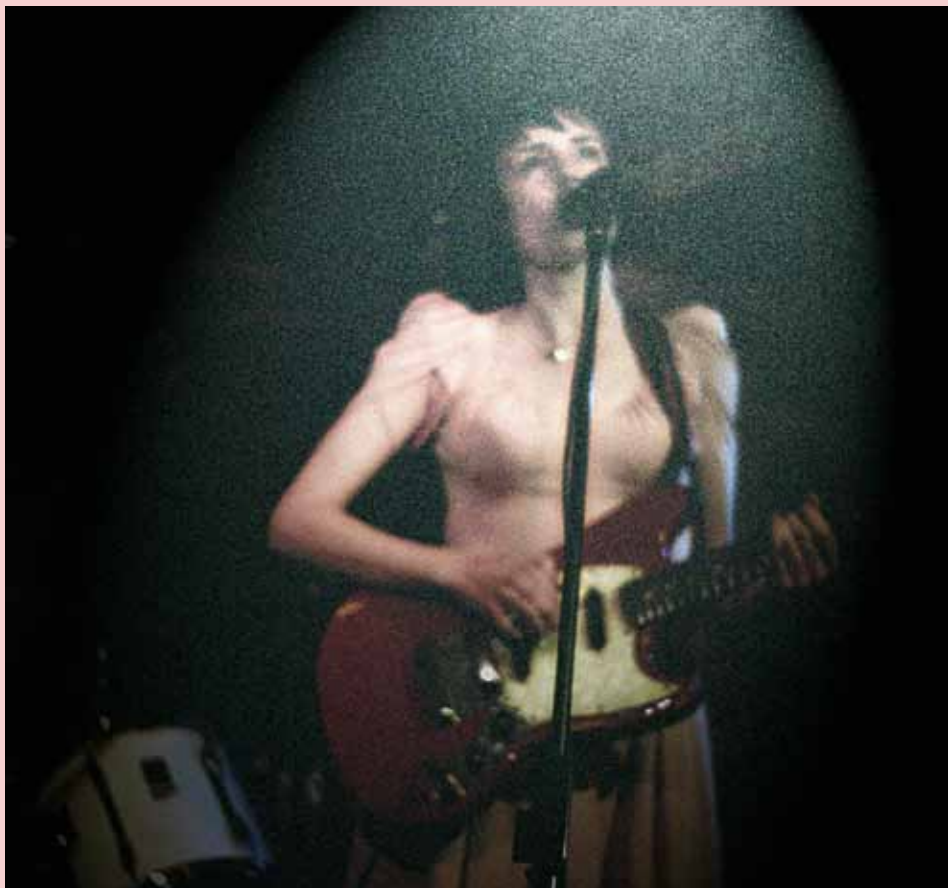
Still in love with classic sound and cinema, *Slow Dance* veers away from eternal summer towards shiny synthesisers in dank foreign discotheques. Produced by K's leader, Calvin Johnston ("He wears a lab coat when recording, which is so cool"), it's a record made for sly shuffling and furtive, flirtatious glances across a smoky den. With Italo disco and dubstep strong on the dancefloor, slow and steady seems to be the new shape-shifting. After all, working up a sweat just messes up your hair and wrecks your fringe, right?

"[Slow dancing] is what's exciting to me now. The kick and the rim with no hat. The bass synth low. *Slow Dance* is Romance with a capital 'R'. How can anyone not like that?"

Jay sure ain't slowing down himself. Not content with a new album, he's also just released a 12-inch ('Love Everlasting') and will soon shoot a video for it at a Seventies 'Diskothek Strip Klub' in Cologne. Back in Angel Town, Jay hangs out at The Smell, and in Paris you'll find him at discotheques like Le Regine. Best of all, catch him in a lounge room at the next house party in town, where he'll spike the punch and make you sway and swoon into the night.

"Some house parties are really fun, but I guess it depends. When they start playing bongo you know its time to go."

www.myspace.com/jeremyjay



mitten

Words: kicking_k

"The Mitten name was because I'd write to a promoter saying 'I am a female singer-songwriter called Mitten. Give me a gig.' They would naturally put me on with other cutesy comfy bands and I would void their audience completely by the time I finished. I love to watch people walk away."

You have 4:13 to join them. MySpace. 'Pumkinpeanutbutternutsquash'. Go. Bass fuzz like oscillating current, like emphysema. "Well, you're spewed out of the womb, bloody and alone/Let's start as we mean to go on," she drawls, mannered, affected, unimpressed, ghost coos and growls multi-tracked around. But what seems set to settle into the carefully-staged eeriness of Fairie

'One can't take one's misery too seriously'

Victoriana sparks into: "Back when Kylie was still selling her arse instead of her...cancer", and that splash of nastiness as soon as she's lined by a tongue/cheek sulk about her "bicycle no one ever steals/I'm starting to take it personally".

"I was rotting away in a bedsit, ripping my hair out, and someone worried about me left a little four-track contraption and some instruments and told me to get well – or at least productive."

"A week later I had a gig. At the end of that, one half of a record company came up, said it was one of the best gigs he had ever been to. They come back to me once a year – via email – saying they want to release an album or whatever. And then disappear. Probably when they sober up the next morning." Instead, three years on, she's on her seventh self-released CD-R, *Success*

In The Grocery Business "One label wanted to do a double album. Apparently. There's about 100 songs to choose from. All much of a muchness, just progressively more aggressive with each passing year..."

"I don't write music. I often can't play the stuff I have recorded again because I turn on the four-track when I'm fired up. And have no idea what I'm doing. So they are very locked into that exact moment."

'Pumkinpeanutbutternutsquash' crawls on through an unflinching depiction of a "pedestrian party" where she's trapped between a "maggot-faced cleric" and "cheese and margarine sandwiches", spraining high notes as the backing vocal is severed by a phone ring with cradle-clattering tantrum ("Every time I'm RECORDING!").

Instrumentally, the record is crowded with what Mitten describes as "...broken drums distorted with old, malfunctioning microphones, harmoniums, electric keyboards and guitars if they are a bit handicapped, typewriter fed through an amp for percussion, etc etc. I often record with the window open in order to get the rain or the screaming midgets outside, or the heavy goods vehicles destroying my gentler feminine wailing songs. One can't take one's misery too seriously. I like to run a truck through it."

The press write yr music comes from 'the edge of madness'... "It sells well. Fragility of mind and heart. Women use it as much as men to compartmentalise straying from the musical norm." But: "I got taken off a radio playlist on the back of my unfriendliness. They really want you to be co-conspirator in the compartmentalisation – and abuse their powers if you don't play coy and mad and cute and grateful."

The song's ending. "Is this my life? 'Cause if it is, I don't want it..." It's like the lights have gone up in the cinema and everyone is gnawed existentially clean. Except she hasn't finished, adding the most sarcastic "...baby" in recording history.

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the beehive considers...record shop stories

Words: Adam Anonymous, Hayley Avron, Daniel Barrow, Petra Davis, Noel Gardner, Thom Gibbs, Tom Howard, kicking_k, Neil Kulkarni, Frances Morgan, Doug Mosurock, Louis Pattison, Ned Raggett, Joe Shooman, Joseph Stannard, Lauren Strain
Illustration: Sarah Lippett

Last Christmas, Zavvi, the music and DVD retailer that replaced the Virgin Megastore on the nation's high streets, went into administration. With only HMV still left to fight the good fight, is this the beginning of the end for the nation's stack-'em-high CD sellers, or just a temporary blip on the retail landscape – and if it is the end, what will replace them?

The supermarkets will replace CD/DVD/merch/games-stores precisely because record shops decided to stop being/looking/feeling like record shops and start being/looking/feeling like supermarkets. Simply not special places anymore... (NK)

I can't bring myself to turn a hair, I'm afraid. Nor do I like the idea of scrambling about in the rubble for goodies – it makes me feel guilty and weird, like I've been neglectful and now all the records are doomed. Record shopping is for special occasions, for presents, for hunger for the perfect fit, and it happens in second-hand or independent shops. (PD)

Record stores thrive when they build a connection with their customers, and a reputation in music communities as a place that is worth patronising. There needs to be some manner of curatorial presence at work, because the old model of chain store stocking everything on a major is clearly dead as a doornail. My friends who work at Revolver, one of the largest and most

reputable independent distros in the USA, say that the CD is far from dead. I'll believe them. (DM)

I think smaller record shops will succeed by specialising in their field, competing less with the surrounding neighbourhood and building a reputation as being the best at what they do in a national or global sense: in the way that Volcanic Tongue has become synonymous with the New Weird America, Aquarius Records does outsider/underground black metal, Sounds Of The Universe corners the quality reissue market, and so on... (LP)

The idea of buying an album is already slightly laughable to most casual music fans my own age. To my 17 year-old cousin, who likes Late Of The Pier and The Twang, the concept is completely perverse. I think there could be an attempt at music 'lifestyle' shops next, offering physical and digital music, web access and 'hangout space' under one roof. (TG)

HMV's musical instrument section, 'Hooters' (hur hur) has been really successful apparently. People with non-'specialist' taste who still want to buy actual CDs can do so in supermarkets. (NG)

Looking back on my teenage visits, getting patronised by grumpy 30-something blokes on the counter, I would say that the social potential of the record shop is a bit overrated and the internet's probably made underground music as a whole much more approachable for young people. (FM)

Certain lifestyle/clothing shops are branching out into faux record stores, forcedly associating themselves with certain types of music. It's like they're saying that, if you drink that coffee, or if you wear those clothes, then you're immediately that specific kind of person that likes No Age or Rod Stewart. And that kind of thing makes me really ill. (LS)

I don't really like any shops, record shops included. Maybe it's because I was brought up in the countryside. (TH)

Tell us about yr first record shop, and yr formative experiences/purchases there? An entry into a whole new world...?

My first thirst for music was sparked in Tower Records; that Scandinavian band Mew were playing an instore in Tower Records when I was about 12 – I'd just wandered in there with mum and dad, heard this noise from below, went down the escalators and scuttled around until I found a box I could stand on to watch on my tiptoes. I just remember being completely awed, like, "What...is...THIS?!" At the time I had no idea who the band were or anything, I ran over to a shop assistant to ask. (LS)

That would be in Cob in Bangor, which at the time was a three-level piece of genius: vinyl downstairs, tapes and vinyl and posters in the middle floor then right up at the top badges and patches. I bought a Status Quo patch and a Motörhead badge. It was full of improbably cool-looking straggly-haired drawlers dressed in leather, denim, ripped things and had a smell of some kind of smoky magic. Things like that stick with you and chipped away at me in terms of what it was possible to do with your life. (Jsh)

In 1993 when I lived in Hull I was working nights in a factory and to compound my misery, one morning when I got back

home after a long night making 'Beverly Hills 90210: The All Over Body Spray' someone had broken into my house and stolen about 200 of my favourite albums. A few weeks later most of them turned up in a second hand record shop where they had been given their own new category: Mad Bastards. (JD)

I was a poor student and hadn't been in for a while, but a few months earlier I'd asked Jerry (of Jerry's) if he ever saw any Sun Ra vinyl. "Naw," he said (picture a guy who looks and sounds like Walter from *The Big Lebowski*). "But I'll let you know if anything comes my way." So I walk into the store on New Year's Eve and he says "Hey Doug, where ya been? I had all these records sitting aside for you", and produces a stack of seven Sun Ra LPs. One was autographed. I'm still stunned by this guy's generosity, and make it a point to visit several times a year. I never leave without about 40 to 50 LPs and singles, and he's got a customer in me for life, so it all works out. Interestingly enough, after I scored all that, I got dumped at midnight, was fired from my job, and my dog died. The universe must have righted itself. (DM)

Indie record shops are kind of antechambers, where obsessions are encouraged (and, um, 'monetised'). You see the same people in them as you do at the nichier nights or shows – it always felt like a secret society organised around ART. (k_k)

My first was a second-hand concern in Harrow called Jamming With Edward. It was run by a rocker dude with a resplendent mane of long, greying hair and piercing blue eyes. I think I had a bit of a displaced dad crush on him. He was a total pussycat, and I'd go in there and talk bollocks about the resurgence of downtuned guitars in grunge and suchlike. I'll never forget it. I hope he's still there. (Jst)

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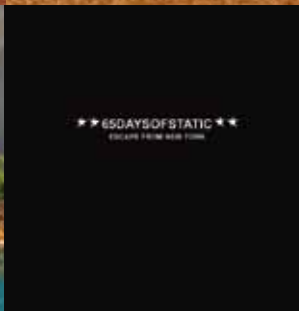
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caught between worlds

Words: **Noel Gardner**

Photography: **Courtney Brooke Hall**

Philadelphia's **Stinking Lizaveta** festoon doom's blackened heart with jazz licks and psychedelic wah-wah. They're not cool, but they do rule

When DIY soothsayers and flameburners of various undergrounds and basic frickin' punk rockers have their subculture ganked by slick marketing men, they get angry. As they should. Thing is, though: the punks only get their iconography robbed cos they're so damn good at creating it. How valuable would something as impactful as the Black Flag bars or Crass' logo and graphics be to a company turning over billions per annum? I don't know either, dude, but this talk makes me ill and what the hell does it have to do with Stinking Lizaveta?

Stinking Lizaveta have something regarded by The Man as equally valuable: the powerful first impression. They're a trio – two brothers, Yanni and Alexi Papadopoulos, on guitar and upright bass, and Yanni's one-time girlfriend Cheshire Augusta on drums – who have released six albums

brutish proto-metalisms of Jimmy Page and Angus Young where so many 'classic rock' aficionados fail. The album's centre contains uncategorisably minimalist rock, a title track that starts off recalling the great and underrated Boston band Karate and ends up sounding like Queen, and judicious use of a theremin – a suggestion of producer Sanford Parker, member of Minsk and Buried At Sea and something of an überproducer in underground metal. Back on the psychedelic track, meanwhile: Yanni agrees. This is partly a result of his recent listening habits, but the crypto-Middle Eastern feel that permeates a number of the album's ten songs is something that he has arrived at via experimenting with different modes and scales on the guitar.

"I like exploring non-diatonic modes. If you're using a diatonic scale like for example A-Minor, or

Stinking Lizaveta don't really seem to care much for that doom aesthetic crystallised, as it were, by Wino – former Saint Vitus/The Obsessed frontman and onetime Lizaveta labelmate and touring partner with Spirit Caravan. (Yanni: "When you see people like him play, you get a certain musical training you never lose. Wino is into books of fringe histories and mysticism; he also loves all kinds of music, from John Coltrane to the Damned.") They AREN'T, pump up the scare quotes, "cool". They ARE, however, repping for the quasi-outlaw culture espoused in underworld metal by virtue of being answerable only to their own whims and changing for no-one. Maybe this has been made easier by slipping through the genre cracks, but given that this has made it harder for them to fit into any scene of convenience, it all evens out.

To this end, it makes sense that Yanni talks in glowing terms about the occasions when they have stuck their heads above the DIY parapet. In 2006, Lizaveta toured the UK in support to Clutch and Corrosion Of Conformity – "our biggest tour to date, with laminates and catering. It was a great experience because there were people at the shows... in the underground world, you never know if you're going to be playing to a hundred people or ten." They've also been touring with The Sword, who are pretty much the current gold standard for hipster/poser/use-other-words-please stoner jams. For one thing, this meant that Yanni and band got to watch Metallica's Philly date backstage, thanks to Lars Ulrich handpicking The Sword to open their US shows. For another, Yanni grew up in Washington DC circa hardcore's era of itchy mutation – his first ever show was Minor Threat, and he was there, James Murphy-style, when Rites Of Spring started getting called emo in '85. He has credentials, and the ability to spot them in others.

"[Sword drummer] Trivett Wingo skipped his high school graduation to go see Man Is The Bastard play to probably 30 people. So before any 'real metalhead' goes talking smack about them, they should ask themselves if they were at that show."

Let's face it, you weren't there.

'We're not trying to compete in the marketplace – just being artists is our goal'

of jazz-touched instrumental doom rock in 15 years and escaped their Philadelphia homestead for frequent tours to pretty much everywhere. Their ability to carry people from the point of virtual or complete non-recognition to jabberjawed riff-love in the space of 40 minutes or so is seriously unsurpassable. Each of the five Stinking Lizaveta shows I've watched have been the same. Saatchi And Saatchi and Ogilvy And Mather and douches like them charge MILLIONS for a fraction (expressed as a percentage) of our heroes' hit rate. Meanwhile, here is Yanni saying, "People always tell us we're hard to categorise. That's because we're in the SST model of a band. That just means we're folks trying to make rock music, not trying to compete in the marketplace – just being artists is our goal."

The above stance gives only the slimmest of suggestions as to why Stinking Lizaveta (named after a character in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky's final novel) are special, unique and totemic. Their riffs are imposingly plump and presented with a toasty analogue warmth, but there's nothing macho or boorish about this reading of metal. Their structures are complex, snakelike, scrunching up the twists of musical DNA every time you think they're getting content with a repetitive pattern – but they're not a math-rock band, as much as people sprint to staple that to any rock band without vocals. "Math-rock is a bit too claustrophobic for my tastes," Yanni ventures; for what it's worth he's mainly referring to the term itself here, and the implications of scholarly revision. "I'm addicted to musical freedom. When we first started this band we thought we would have a singer in a matter of months, and just kept playing gigs figuring that was the best way to get someone's attention. Well, here we are 15 years later.

"We only have one track with vocals, 'War Of The Worlds', on our third album. A friend named Chip, who is schizophrenic, just started chanting the lyrics. I asked him if we could use them on the album and he agreed. Now he calls me up threatening my life and legal action for stealing his song."

A tangent to this part of our chat (which, incidentally, Yanni introduces by informing me of his state of nudity; to be fair, it is 10am on a Sunday at his end) comes with a suggestion that the new album *Sacrifice And Bliss* is Lizaveta's most psychedelic venture yet. Coming in at a peachy 40 minutes – their last two, splendid as they were, had gilded the lily somewhat at around an hour each – all is held together by wah pedals stomped through floorboards and central riffs that nail the

ABCDEFG – just changing one note, like G to G sharp, you get new chords, a different relationship between the notes, and some would say an 'exotic' sound."

Yanni also plays guitar in another band, The Gypsy Hands Tribal Bellydance Troupe, who soundtrack bellydance performances. "We've played [Tennessee festival] Bonaroo for the past five years. There aren't any songs, we just bliss out three hours a day while the dancers juggle fireballs and blow flames. After four days, I've usually forged a few good riffs for Stinking Lizaveta."

And there's another one for the are/aren't axis. These three are respectively aged between their late thirties and late forties and have hair coming out of their scalp at more angles than a professional snooker player considers in a lifetime...and Yanni generally wears a waistcoat onstage.





Ask anyone involved what Wham City means, and almost all of them get excited. Emails surge with exclamation marks and sentences that cause hyperventilation if you read them out loud. Wham City is magickal, liberating, transformative. There are lots of quotes like: "It changed my life" and "It saved my life."

This Baltimore collective of artists and musicians is anarchic: everyone is able to perform, and create, and play whatever weirdness they can conjure. Wham City has no rules, no leaders, and anything is possible. All this may be true. But like it or not, the reason everyone's paying attention right now, across the world, at house parties and through blogs and in articles like this one – isn't just the collective. It's that grinning, slightly bearded guy in Sally Jessy Raphael glasses who plays laptop sets in the middle of warehouse dance floors, calling out ridiculous dance instructions that audiences, everywhere, follow with preschoolers' uninhibited glee. It's Dan Deacon.

Dan Deacon's a leader who won't admit to being one – he squirms away from the thought. He keeps asking "Do you know what I mean?" and saying "I'm such an asshole!" But he

isn't – if anything, he may be some kind of freakazoid savant, he's so good at instantly figuring out the potential of any given situation, and understanding how other people might be thinking about it. Don't get me wrong: he's no messiah. But he's one hell of a community organizer. He works with people's strengths and finds opportunities in all limitations. He brings everyone together. And then things go exponential.

This is kind of what happened with Dan Deacon, Wham City, and the Baltimore music scene over the past few years.

build voice

This whole story starts a few years before the release of *Spiderman Of The Rings*, Deacon's 2007 pixelated, raucous, compulsive dayglo lightshow stomp of an album. It might start in Purchase College, in upstate New York, in the early years of this century, where Deacon and friends (Wham City stalwarts Adam Endres, Dina Kelberman, Josh Kelberman, Abra Aducci, Connor Kizer and Peter O'Connell, among others) studied art and music and composition. The Wham City name came from Endres' half-

joke suggestion for a dorm-naming contest at Purchase. After graduation, they considered moving to Pittsburgh or Brooklyn, but Baltimore won out, partly because there was already a lot of music and art and weird stuff going on, and partly because it was cheap.

You could argue, too, that the Wham City origin myth may depend on the scattershot geography of Baltimore itself, patchworked with decaying buildings, band houses and spaces like the Copycat building, a multistorey warehouse full of studios that housed artists and musicians. Wham City set up there around 2004, and the Copycat was home and show space and nerve centre of the group until 2006.

But let's go back to *Spiderman...*, because it's a total case study of how Deacon thinks, and it's the point when everything got huge.

Spiderman Of The Rings, like almost every Wham City project, is an exercise in making constraints useful. *Spiderman Of The Rings* sounds as brash and chunky as it does because when he wrote it, Deacon was considering the places he'd be performing it. "The main problem is that when I was going to play, all the places had horrible PAs, or whatever bass amps,



Dan Deacon isn't a pied piper, or a cult leader – he's just a freakazoid savant, singing his heart out over starburst electronics and dancing blocks of colour (and if anyone gets inspired along the way, all the better). Take the square-wave assault course of new album *Bromst* and learn how a united front of artists, pioneers, and activists are dreaming the city of Baltimore towards a day-glo future

Words: **Emily Bick**

Photography: **Justin Hollar**

keyboard amps you could string together." So he designed a record that would sound even better with the added scuzz and rattle of the world's worst club soundsystems. "I started experimenting with different sounds, with the PA at Wham City, which is probably the worst PA anyone could have, and the more delicate the sounds were, the more they got lost, so I worked the distortion into the songs, kept the wave forms as simple as possible." He also had a powerbook he describes as "completely fucked... amps had fallen on it, the screen was attached with duct tape". Its memory was full, so instead of finding new samples, he cut up old Beach Boys samples into unrecognisable segments, and built on those sounds and whatever else he already had to create *Spiderman*. "Kind of like making dinner with whatever's in the cupboard," he explains.

What surprised me is that Deacon's new album, *Bromst*, was written at the same time as *Spiderman*. *Bromst* is more mature, and cinematic – its final song, 'Get Older', sounds like the triumphal chords surging over the end credits of a complicated RPG video game. *Bromst* is full of drones, from the haunting

Appalachian death-rattle vocal on 'Wet Wings' (sampled from a thrifted folk tape given to him by an ex-girlfriend) to Steve Reich marimba scales. It's delicate and precise, the kind of record that you can lie down and listen to with your eyes closed time and time again, and different layers will make themselves heard.

"The whole point of *Spiderman* was to get

as sheet music, which he plans to give away for free. When he tours *Bromst* and can't bring his 15-strong ensemble along, he hopes to audition local musicians to play with him.

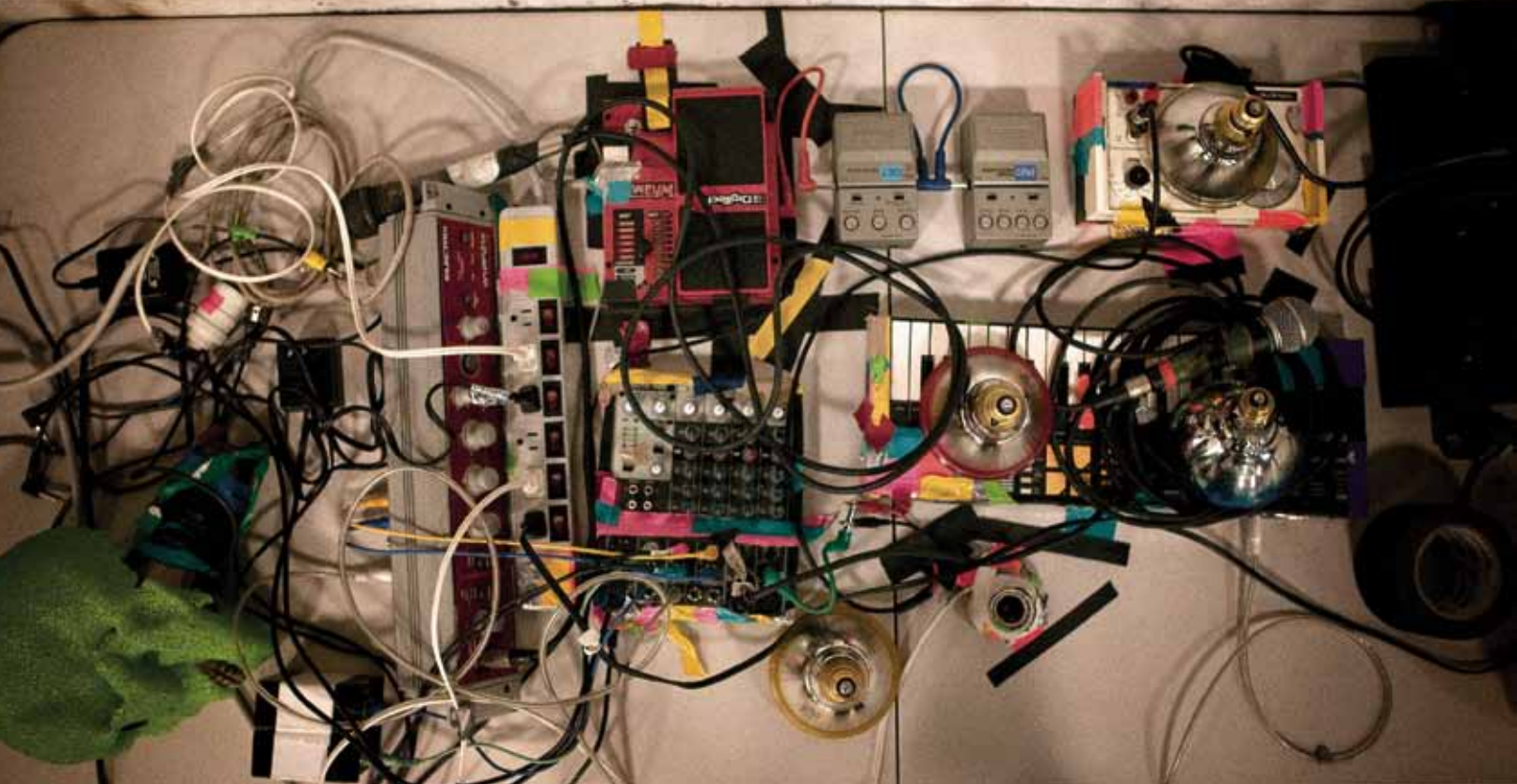
But Dan Deacon has always favoured performances with a communal element. Wham City is famous for its US-crossing Round Robin tour, where several bands take turns

'I'm hopeful for that consciousness shift, and you start that on a base level. You start with the community'

people dancing by the end of the set. With *Bromst* that started to change a bit. I wanted it to have the same peaks of intensity, but more variety. Last time it was mayhem. Now I want it to be a little more sombre, a little more subtle."

Touring *Bromst* might not be a full on dance party, but Deacon has plans for audience participation. He's working on transcribing it

playing songs. "From a band's perspective, it's great. Because then there's no opener or no closer, no one has to play to an audience that's just milling in or just being warmed up, and no one gets to play when everyone is all comfortable, everyone gets to play at all of those times. So we're all on the same base level, audience, performer, everybody."



'The most important thing is sincerity. With regards to the bands that I like, they're doing it because if they didn't do it, it would drive them crazy'

The second Round Robin tour took place before the release of *Spiderman*. "It was just five Wham City bands, eight people. Me, Santa Dads, Blood Baby, Video Hippos, and Butt Stomach. It was a lot of fun, but we all had pneumonia, bronchitis, one of us broke a rib, the van we were in didn't have any seats. That kind of put a damper on my Round Robin brain for a while. It was fun but stressful. Then my record came out a few months later. Tours became more intense, shows became more constant, and it was harder to do group projects.

"But it had always been in the back of my mind that I wanted to do it again. Now there's been three total tours and the last one that happened, that was 60 people, by far the largest, and the most fun I've had in my life.

"It was a cross section of what's going on in Baltimore right now. It's not just Wham City, there's all this stuff going on on the west side... like Tarantula Hill, Floristree, a lot of stuff going on. There's not just one local scene or local aesthetic. A lot of people didn't know each other more than a hello and a handshake before, and now they're close friends, and the city seems smaller and more community based. A lot of the stuff we were doing we were doing on the fly. How do we house 60 people? How do we feed 60 people dinner? It was completely DIY, and it was awesome to see how many people emerged to say, 'I will do this'... and there was no complaining about it."

I tell him he's a one-man tourist board.

He laughs. "Well, I am trying to get a grant from the city, because I think it brings a lot of attention to Baltimore. Hopefully we can do it with about one per cent more comfort next time."

fountain flows gold

Then there's been Whartscape – the Wham City music festival, which debuted in 2006. "We wanted to put on a Baltimore music festival with bands we liked. We were trying to figure out the best time to do it because all our shows were completely illegal and we were like, 'How the hell are we going to get away with 12 hours of music? For two days in a row, without the cops coming, without getting busted. So the city has this festival called Artscape. Well, we thought the cops would all be at Artscape making sure that the people from the suburbs don't get mugged... there'll be so much going on that everyone'll be over there. And if we call it something that sounds like Artscape, people will think it's a part of it. So we called it Whartscape. And it worked!"

"Then the second year we wanted to push it a little further, so we found a vacant alley and asked all the buildings around if we could run extension cords from their buildings. They were all, like, 'Yeah, but don't get caught, and if you do we don't know who you are.' We hung up this huge banner to be as obvious about it as possible, so that if the cops did come, we could be like 'We're part of Artscape!'"

That year, Pitchfork and international press were all over Whartscape. Huge crowds were expected. "So we decided to tell the city about it, and [the council] were like, we know, we're also on the internet. They gave us a thousand dollars for a grant to build the stages and pay for electricity. It was really exciting, we expanded it to four days of shows, Matmos and Negativland headlined... I feel like we included a lot more of Baltimore, and that's been the goal every year, taking baby steps into including as many people as we can."

"Last year's Whartscape was the biggest yet, and we learned a lot from that. We don't want it to grow any larger. We want to keep it the exact same size. We literally have no backstage area, no green room – there's no hierarchy between performer and audience. Once I was backstage with Bradford from Deerhunter, and some guy from, I won't even say what band it was, he was like, 'Yuck, I don't want to be out there with all those people!' and I'm like, 'Why are you even playing here? All those people are the fans, they're out there to see us! It was truly disheartening. We try to make Whartscape artist-friendly and audience-friendly, an even plane.'"

Everyone, famous or not, gets paid for playing at Whartscape. There's no corporate sponsorship, no profit. I'm as charmed by this egalitarianism as by Deacon's ability to find the best qualities in his collaborators, and work with them. I won't call him a *networker* because this seems both business-speak smarmy and inappropriately self-serving, about using connections for personal gain. But Deacon and Wham City really seem to be built around friends supporting each other, and shows where audiences and performers are symbiotic.

At his shows, people seem to snap into ecstatic fits of flailing grinning sweat that last through the entire set. Break circles form; people cluster around Deacon and his mass of fluorescent cables and wires; they respond to his calls to dance, and they form square-dance tunnels of people for couples to run through. Joining in can be powerful. But what about people who go to a Dan Deacon show not to participate, but to blot themselves out?

"I never really thought about it until midway through the *Spiderman Of The Rings* tour, but I was



'There's not just one local scene or local aesthetic'

like, all these people look like they're having fun, but I don't know if they're getting it. With *Bromst*, I'd like to say that the record is more like a celebration than like a party. A party is getting out there to have fun, which is cool, but I also think a celebration has a connotation of reflecting on an accomplishment. You know what I mean? I want people to think, well, why am I celebrating? Am I doing it because I want to forget about the problems in my life? Or am I excited about what I'm doing? Am I going to these things because I have no purpose and I live vicariously through people who have a vision? Or I have a vision and I'm about being associated with others who have a vision.

"It's really difficult to instill those ideas without sounding like a teacher. And I don't want to sound like a teacher, I don't want to be a guide, I get referred to as a cult leader, as a piper, and that's the last thing that I want. Being someone else who doesn't respond well to people telling them what to do, I just want to help people find their own path, their own reasons to feel excited and fulfilled, and that's sort of the point with Wham City."

As an example, he tells me about Ed Schrader, an old friend who transformed himself into a talk show host with a record out. "He was living in upstate New York, and he didn't really have focus. He was making music, but he never felt like he was good enough to play in front of people. Then he came down to Baltimore for a weekend, and it changed his life. A while ago, for his 30th birthday, some of us were watching the Greatest Hits of *The Ed Schrader Show* like, wow, he's really got it."

Later via an email, Ed Schrader agrees: "Wham City marks the point in my life where I went from

being a weird guy muttering to himself on a tape recorder in alleys, to a weird guy muttering to himself on a tape recorder in alleys and playing it for a bunch of other weird people who actually wanted to hear it. That type of support really promotes a good synergy with artists. I wish everyone could experience it. It has saved my life."

But for every Ed Schrader who takes some of the Wham City spirit and goes on to live his dreams, what about the countless people who don't live their dreams, who despair in shitty jobs and can't produce their own art or music?

"It's all about confidence," Deacon counters. "And anyone can do it, but you've got to make sure that you're not there to get fucked, or get wasted, just find someone to screw, or something like that. A lot of dance culture is about getting lost, and being like whatever, I worked all day at some shitty office job that I hate, and I'm going to go out and have a good time. That can be therapy for someone, but I don't think it'd be the proper therapy. Do you know what I mean? That's a good way to realise that you hate your office job. But you shouldn't—it's not like, I hate the relationship that I'm in, so I'll cheat on my wife. You know what I mean? It's not like that."

"The most important thing is sincerity. I never really thought of it in terms of an audience before, but regards to the bands that I like, if they're not doing it because if they didn't do it, it would drive them crazy...if you don't want your audience to be insincere either, to be going to a show just to be seen, or because they heard it was going to be popular. You can't tell your audience how to enjoy your music or what to take away from it, but you can hope. When it's 20 people, you can tell that

connection, but when it's 20,000 I don't know how much of an impact you can actually have. I like an audience that's coherent. I like getting drunk, and I've been drunk at shows so I can see where they're coming from [laughs] but when you're in a room with two thousand drunk people, it gets difficult.

"I'd rather play four 500 person shows than one 2000 person show, and I'd rather those be half empty, so there's room to breathe. The comfort level is important."

I want to believe in Dan Deacon's vision so much that I suspect it must be too good to be possible. But how long can Wham City last? Deacon tells me that Wham City has no rules or manifestoes. There's constant debate about whether to incorporate and become eligible for more arts funding, or keep things informal. When we first spoke in January, there had been no official Wham City meeting yet this year, partly because it was hard to find a space that was big and safe enough. Some people in Wham City have babies now, and they want a space where they could breastfeed. This may now have been resolved; Wham City seems to thrive on solving these kind of problems.

But then there's the almost inevitable trajectory that all scenes pass through: It's like any scene that's flooded with publicity gets battered by the rebound wave of gentrification. I hope the city council that helped pay for Whartscape had noble motives, but they could well have been taking cues from business books like Richard Florida's *Cities And The Creative Class*, which argue that it's great to nurture an art scene in a city, because that'll make it appeal to a professional 'creative class', who will swoop in with lots of cash and buy all the affordable



baltimore's native strain of weirdness isn't clowny, it's psychotic

Interview: **Emily Bick**

Photography: **Zach Klein**

Exploring Baltimore with hometown boy **Rjyan Kidwell**, formerly laptop jockey Cex, now of husband-wife duo Sandcats

You lived in Baltimore for a long time before moving to San Francisco, and were really involved in the local music scene and wrote for the City Paper. What made you decide to leave?

"I left Baltimore three days after Christmas 2002 and came back at the end of 2003. I left because touring makes you insane. I've written two or three albums that are pretty much exclusively about this, about the weird ways it distorts your perspective and how there's almost no books you can read about it, nowhere to turn for even the teensiest bit of assurance, like, 'Dude, everybody goes nuts on tour.'"

You have said that one reason you came back to Baltimore is that you saw how the US government left New Orleans to rot after Katrina, and you wouldn't be surprised if it left Baltimore the same way, so you wanted to live there before that happened. Could you explain a bit more?

"Baltimore is grim. There are no good jobs here, and unless you stay in a very narrow strip of town in the centre of the city you're constantly confronted with pretty bleak images of segregation, poverty, and decay. Huge swathes of the city seem like they've been completely written off by the ruling class. All this in the largest city in the richest state in the US.

"So I have no faith that, if this place were in peril, anybody with power would take much interest. Mainly though, my point is that up until Katrina, I had never considered the idea that a city as beautiful and historic as New Orleans would be abandoned in such a dire hour. I love Baltimore. I feel a real sense of belonging here. Edgar Allan Poe, HL Mencken, John Waters, Daniel Higgs, Tupac Shakur, Sylvia Beach, Frederick Douglass, Ben Carson, Philip Glass, Upton Sinclair: fuck yeah, that's my crew."

What would you say makes Baltimore so special?

"I think Baltimore is the ideal place to make art because glamour cannot thrive here. That's changed a little bit over

the last five years, I think, but it's still basically true: you can't come here and impress people by resembling something that's already famous, or by connecting yourself with something successful. Even the legitimate venues — the ones within the city limits, at least — are consistently grimy places run by very down-to-earth individuals. Most people are too concerned with getting their own shit together to waste time blowing smoke up your ass. You either realise you need to get your own hustle tight so you can eat, or you're independently wealthy and quickly move to NYC, Philly, or DC in order to be around people who respect that kind of thing.

"Our empire is crumbling. Our unbridled materialism, our macho pride, our culture's general view that other nations are either cheap USA knock-offs or backwards savage shitholes — the consequences are starting to stack up in plain view. I think, as people start to have more trouble paying their bills and finding real food, there's going to be a rejection of glamour. People are going to want help, they're going to want real comfort, not just distraction, not just inane spectacle. Musicians might move into the role that authors once held, strong individuals who help steer our culture through the labyrinth of deception we're born into. Film and TV require so many people and so much equipment that I think they'll be much more difficult to liberate, but rock'n'roll needs far less. You can do it all yourself, you don't need to enter into any Faustian bargains with cannibalistic enablers."

What are the differences between Baltimore now and, say, ten or fifteen years ago?

"There's more venues, and they don't close down nearly as fast. Ten to fifteen years ago, if you went to 'shows' (as opposed to 'concerts') you were a punk. Punk and its ideology loomed large over shows then. Now, not so much. You don't necessarily subscribe to punk ideals if you're in a band playing warehouses and basements and dives. In fact, it seems like most bands are doing everything they can

to 'blow up'. Back then, it was a big deal to do a tour. Now, there are bands that book shows before they've even written any songs. It seems like a lot of kids want to be in a band in order to tour, to go on these little paid vacations with their friends."

Besides your own projects, what Baltimore bands through the ages do you really love?

What's engaging about what's going on now?

"I will always love Lungfish and Universal Order Of Armageddon, and consider them the quintessential Baltimore bands... weird as hell, but also very imposing. Today there's some neon sweatpants goofball shit going down, but it's mostly imports, art college kids capitalising on the legacy of Baltimore as a "weird" place. The thing is, it's always been both weird AND scary. Baltimore's native strain of weirdness isn't clowny, it's psychotic.

"And of course I have so much love for the club scene. Another example of a Baltimore artform that is weird, but not clowny, still rugged and kind of scary. The relentless, lo-fi sound of that scene when I was 18 was mindblowing. I figured out pretty fast that there were maybe a dozen people in the world who knew about this music outside of Baltimore, but it was huge here — so big that for years hip-hop heads would bitch about club harshing their vibe because girls would go dance to club instead of watching dudes rap."

"The thing that's engaging about what's going on now is how chaotic it is. It's kind of like *The Warriors* — different crews in different parts of town, nobody really dominates. Wham City gets the most props outside of town, but that hasn't seemed to affect the way anybody treats each other. It goes back to the grim reality around us. Hard to take the adulation of some webzines to your head when you've got this reality right outside your window."

places to live. Baltimore's still a city with a lot of crime and no real centre to gentrify. Recession and fear may contain this; it's hard to say.

"I've never thought about it except as pockets, of where people live", says Deacon. "And there's horrible crime throughout the city so there're very few hospitable neighbourhoods that people live in, or that you ever need to go to because there's no destination within that neighbourhood. So I guess one thing people talk about is how do we make the city more connected? There's horrible public transportation, it's probably one of the most segregated cities in America, you can't walk from this part to that part without fear of getting mugged or worse, it's not a very bike-friendly city, most of us don't have cars or even drivers' licenses so how are we going to do this? But we move in baby steps, and if we think about a city, if in 10 years we feel a lot smaller and more connected, it would be very successful."

Ed Schrader puts it more succinctly. "I would like people to know that Baltimore is not as scary as one might believe. It is a magical place where people actually give a crap. I'd take it over New York any day of the week. It is a city that finds grace within the rusty planks of its vague components."

And again, it seems like here is a ruined place where people can start to dream among the debris, and with enough imagination, they can build. In the future, Deacon would like to see Wham City build even more bridges and become more of a community centre. He'd like to see lectures, classes, kids' activities, a place for people from the neighbourhood to stop by.

Still, Deacon's worried about the future, and not just in Baltimore. He tells me about Monsanto and patents on the food supply, about secret prisons being built, energy supplies running out, climate change, corporate media — it's enough to paralyse most people into a 'we're all doomed and no one can do anything' cycle of despair and inaction. But then we talk about 2012, and the end of the Mayan calendar. "A lot of us are obsessed with 2012, the idea of that paradigm shift. I do believe we're on this ever-narrowing precipice where at one side there's an age of enlightenment unlike any other, where a collective consciousness gets up between individuals and large groups, and materials, possessions and the earth, where everything feels very connected, and there's no advantage being taken of anyone, or it could go the exact opposite way and we return to an age of kings, like a massive dark age with huge amounts of suffering.

"I'm hopeful for that consciousness shift, and you start that on a base level. You start with the community. You start that with whoever you can connect with, and in Baltimore we try to connect in as many ways as possible."

'Most people are too concerned with getting their own shit together to waste time blowing smoke up your ass'





ponytail

Words: **George Taylor**

Photography: **Frank Hamilton**

"I think we're all really psyched about music getting happier!" – Molly Seigel

Forming in 2004, in response to a 'make a band' assignment at Maryland Institute College Of Art – "Best class ever!" says Molly – Baltimore's Ponytail released one of the few standout albums of last year that embraced jubilation as a fundamental component of thrashing out (see also *Nouns, Skeleton*). The title *Ice Cream Spiritual* is a perfect description for the transcendental sugar rush within. Tracks like 'Beg Waves' and 'Celebrate The Body Electric' outgrow their concrete gestation and make a break for the ocean...srsly, Ponytail's music crashes and splashes, coasts and washes. If I'm thinking Pacific it's 'cause I hear the jubilant noise-pop of Japan's OIOIO and the psychedelic feedback of New Zealand's The Dead C, boosted by the natural highs that healthy living yields. There's no bass, 'cause with all this buoyancy there's no need for an anchor, right?

Meanwhile, upfront, the vocal coming from Molly Seigel is a variegated run through of wild communication – functioning like audio Rorschach blots, what you pick out may end up saying more about you than Molly. So – is yr singing style part of any concept within the group, or did it just come out naturally through practice?

"When I first started vocalising it just sorta came out," says Molly. "I knew that I didn't like the way a lot of singers were approaching singing currently and I wanted to do something different, but I also was unsure of my ability to actually sing, and just too nervous to really try...so it was born out of a combination of factors."

"I guess I look at what I do as tapping into the energy of the music as much as possible and then trying to add something that it needs or just express it. It's like surfing and making something at the same time."

Has coming out of a fine art background, with all four members being art graduates, informed the way that Ponytail operates/represents itself?

"I don't think any of us can deny that being so heavily exposed to conceptual art, that being born out of an art context has majorly affected everything we do from our live show, to writing, to how we answer interview questions...we have

'It's like surfing and making something at the same time'

a critically objective view of ourselves sometimes, we like to make fun of our band-ness."

What has forming in Baltimore meant to Ponytail? I can imagine that a scene with as much colour, variation, and a committed DIY atmosphere as yrs does, helps and inspires a hell of a lot? Do you have particular favourites/tight buddies?

"I think starting in an exciting community probably influenced the energy level of the band, made it higher...it's influenced our live show more than our sound. The band Thank You is great and we are pretty close with them. Also, Double Dagger. The drummer for Double Dagger has a project called Smart Growth that is really awesome. There are countless others like Cex and Dan Deacon... it's always been a scene with a lot of different types of music happening."

On Pitchfork.tv you can currently view footage of the group playing in an NYC Laundromat, which is a minor stroke of metaphorical genius, as well as a cheeky prank. Sure, it says, Ponytail pretty much simulate the conditions of a monsoon for half an hour...but so does a washing machine. Of course, the band are all smiles the whole set through.

www.myspace.com/jreamteam



ecstatic sunshine

Words: **Beth Capper**

The classes taught at art school are outside the realm of what any other educational institution could get away with, the advertised syllabi merely a mask for some semester-long exploration of unbounded creativity. "I think what made Baltimore's music scene unique was the kind of education so many of us had at school, because of classes taught by Jeremy Sigler," says Ecstatic Sunshine's Matt Papich. "He taught a class called 'Para-Painting'. It was a painting credit, but in the class, there was only one assignment: start a band and perform with all the other bands of the

'What made Baltimore's music scene unique was the kind of education so many of us had at school'

class at the end of the semester. Each session of the class included watching films relating to music or performance. Some people were musicians, but most had no idea how to play instruments at all."

Shortly thereafter, Ecstatic Sunshine, the double-guitar duo that matches Papich up with Dustin Wong, was born. Following three albums – 2004's *New Kind of Imagination*, 2006's *Freckle Wars*, and last year's *Way* – Wong went full time with Ponytail, and Papich recruited a new member in Kieran Gillen on electronics. The songs on *Freckle Wars* are bright and humorous, with pretty solos that bounce in the air, and then hit the ground running, ambushing soft notes by shredding at them. On *Way*, Gillen's additions sample and convert Papich and Wong's plucky guitar lines into hypnotic dronescapes.

The more serious direction in which Ecstatic Sunshine are now heading marks them out from the Baltimore scene, which possibly explains their absence from the recent Round Robin Tour. The Baltimore scene may have spawned Ecstatic Sunshine, but they've got ambitions elsewhere.

"I'd hope that people can consider my music without linking it specifically to Baltimore or the scene here," says Papich. "That's not to say that I'm unhappy to have been a part of all of it in some way, just that I'm wary of the whole thing falling flat."

www.myspace.com/ecstaticsunshine

scene and heard: baltimore

Words: Lauren Strain

Normal folk transformed into drooling fun-monsters by Dan Deacon's party-ray

The Lexie Mountain Boys

Not boys, but girls – five of them, spearheaded by one Lexie MacMacchie. We're sick of words like 'shamanic' and 'totemic', 'cause they're cropping up in all sorts of (high) places these days; and especially in reference to any all-female group, as though a bunch of women can't get together and make music *without* it sounding a little witchy, a little ritualistic – and you *know* that's patronising. But there's a sliver of relevance in those signifiers here, 'cause these Lexie Mountaineers' debut record, *Sacred Vacation*, is a protracted collision of mostly wordless voices, each track circling a fulcrum of light like a moth to magnesium. Recorded in a deserted church hall, *Sacred Vacation* is basically a recording of five people allowing themselves to be subsumed by the acceptance of human voicebox as toy, emulating duck sex, dog pants, pained screams, plaster rips, horn toots and silly screams. 'Catcall' sees the girls bitching and twitching and flinching: "You got a huuuuus-band!", they jeer, "You got a boyyyyy-freyyynd". Live shows have featured human pyramids and painting the walls with their hair.

www.myspace.com/mountainlex

Teeth Mountain

Future Islands recently told us their favourite sparring partners are these oiks, and, yeah, I get it: press the play button on their MySpace page and searing blue waves of scree turn caustic and the whole room becomes a percussion rack. It's an entrancing clamour of noise; wordless, concentric circles of thrilling clatter choose your body as their epicentre and build around it – 'Ghost Science' traps you in a translucent mesh of feedback and scythed light, where yer skull

Duck sex, dog pants, pained screams, plaster rips, horn toots and silly screams

becomes dominion of a fearsome experiment, instruments screaming like animals, drums swarming like insects. www.myspace.com/teethmountain

Future Islands

Upset The Rhythm presented us with *Wave Like Home*, Future Islands' first album, last year; and my eye-goo melted, dribbled down my face and landed on my laptop. "Oh good god!" you cried, "That sounds horrendous! Why?!" Because, I tell you, it felt like someone had exhumed a clutch of pop songs buried before I was born, dug it out with a rusty old spade, flooded it in light and soldered buzzsaw synthy stuff and digi-pixel disco lites to the frayed nerves: "We could live out here forever!" gobbles singer Sam Herring. As (possibly) one of the most aesthetically similar of the Baltimore gangs to scene daddy Dan Deacon, they share his taste in video artwork – all chopped up pics and colour filters, computer game lexicon and plenty of kitten exposure.

www.myspace.com/futureislands

**Video Hippos**

You'll tell by their name that this lot are bouncy; and they're certainly the sunnier gang in Baltimore's wacky warehouse, their sugary songs bubbling at their seams with ecstatic keys and smiley, computer-generated splodges. I'm pretty sure they've made one of their videos (for 'Happy Creek') entirely from a sequence of Microsoft Paint masterpieces. It's all imbued with enough virulent joy to make you sick: but at least your vomit will be the colour of a whole packet of Skittles, and you'll look at it and be pretty impressed. Also: I'm beginning to cobble together a small theory that most of these bands sound so good precisely because they don't really say anything, and that there's often a lot of value in surrendering your thoughts and voice to the current of sounds. Don't speak; use instinct, lose language.

www.videohippos.com

Adventure

North Carolina-born, Baltimore-based Benny Boeldt directs a canny nod toward his sound before you've even popped the CD in the drive; his packaging utilises three colours only, and those colours, reader, are the bane of every office worker's life: magenta, cyan and the, um, fancy name for that yellow colour. Printer colours!

So this guy makes music from... computers, right? Right. And it's chirpy, alive, and particularly influenced by the Sega Genesis games of yore, 'cept transplanted through more synths, cogs and wheels and then told to aim high, for the dancefloor. If this music sounds anything like the perky conversations and the dinky disco parties held between nodes, then it must be pretty awesome being a laptop. www.myspace.com/adventuresound

**Wye Oak**

Named after a resilient tree that stood for almost fifty decades in the grounds of Wye Mill, Maryland, you'd guess that the music of Jenn Wasner and Andy Stack would be resolute and generous. You'd be correct; debut record *If Children* receives listeners with care and attention, layering an isolated clarinet with sheets of blanched guitar and tender (if a little passionless) vocals. It's clear that Baltimore staples Beach House are an antecedent, and we'd argue that Wye Oak sound perhaps a little too comfortable within such a gauzy, hazy sphere – but lightly treading the fairy footsteps of fellow duo Victoria Legrand and Alex Scally is no faulty beginning.

www.wyeoakmusic.com



queen of clubs

Words: Ben Mechen

Illustration: Anke Weckmann

The life and death of **K-Swift**, the female Bmore DJ that brought the city together

On 21 July last year, Miss Khia D Edgerton, aka the Club Queen K-Swift, who for over 10 years had been Baltimore club music's most influential and respected DJ, died in a swimming pool accident at her home. The day before, she had been mixing it up at the city's Artscape festival, a free event that tries to bring together this notoriously fractious city through music. She mixed quickly, cutting tracks in and out, shoulders thrown forward, her heavy black dreads swinging with the beats and regimental breaks. Total control. She played to college kids and corner boys and girls, and they all rocked it; in Baltimore dancing is big and wild, sometimes real rump-shaking, filthy dirty, other times dizzying, technical, with on-the-spot routines called things like Crazy Legs, or the Spongebob. Some in the crowd had practised – a lot – and others clearly had no idea, shocking out with no shape. Everyone, though, did *something*.

"That's the memory I'll hold to my heart," says Buck Jones, a party host who held fort on stage with Swift again and again over the years. "It was our final time together, packed with all races, all ages... She was for the people. She never shunned anyone. She always had time." So when Swift died, the main city newspaper, who had voted Swift Baltimore's best club DJ four times, ran it on the front page. The city's mayor offered her condolences on 92Q, the station where she made became famous, and where her show drew more listeners than any other within city limits. In Baltimore, club music is something you're born into, a real fabric of life thing. The north-east might be the cradle of hip-hop, but here, it is club music, not rap, that has for nearly 20 years been shaking down the crumbling blocks. It's Baltimore pop music.

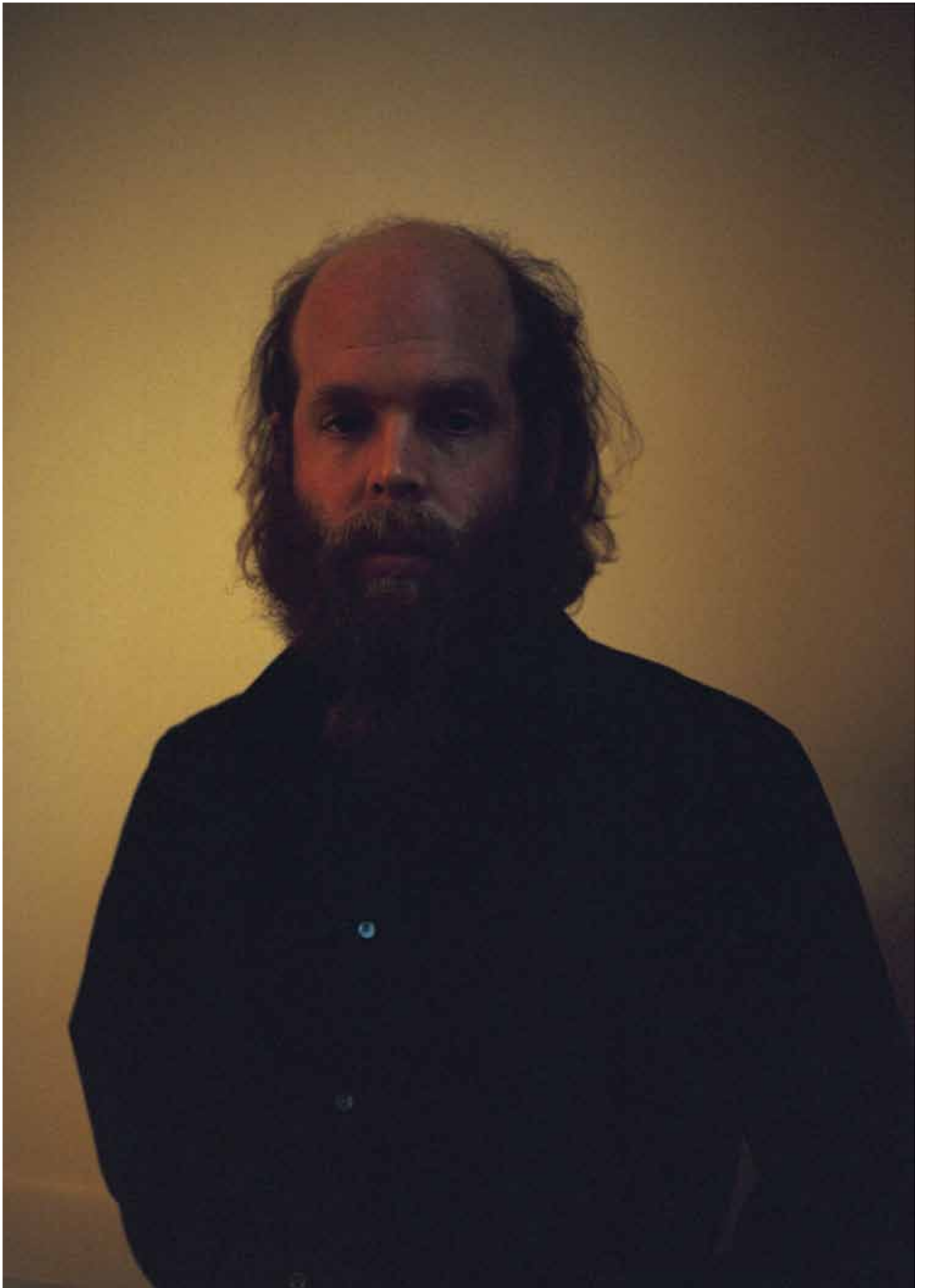
Swift started at 92Q in 1998. By that point, club music was about 10 years old. It had grown out of Miami bass, but also hard, raw house and techno colliding with rap's sampling and call and response hooks. It worked with a limited palette, mainly because no one back then had the right gear, but even today the template remains the same; breakbeats largely culled from only two songs (Lyn Collins' 'Think About It', 'Sing Sing' by Gaz), warped snatches from old TV shows and kids cartoons, playing the dozens lewder and cruder than everyone else. Club music both then and now was wholly unrefined, proudly impolite, but real, local, and never taking prisoners.

But though Swift never changed the sound of Baltimore club, she helped change the game. Through her radio show, through the parties she hosted and organised, and through her businesses, like her label and management company Club Queen Entertainment, or the record pool she ran, she helped club music leave the hood economics of old behind. She wanted everyone to get paid what they earned, to get their records on shelves (not least her own, which were outselling Soulja Boy in the city at the peak of his fame), or to get DJs the latest tracks for the weekend. Over the last few years, figures like Aaron Lcrate, Diplo, and even Glasgow's Dress 2 Sweat Records, have used the internet to take a clutch of American microscenes worldwide, and club music has been no exception – indeed, you only need to listen to a mix by Sinden to hear how ubiquitous the Bmore template has become, a sure-fire and simply way for budding producers to destroy a dancefloor. K-Swift can take credit for this – before her few dreamed that club music could really reach outside Maryland, and none had given it the more foundations it needed to do so.

And, uniquely, she did all this against the grain; though club music is enjoyed by men and women pretty much equally – club is about dancing and it's always taken two – the club music industry, like so many others, has from the start been dominated by men. "When we used to do this club called the Tunnel," remembers Buck, "she would always come up to me before her set to make sure I'd keep saying her name and that she was the one mixing, because most people didn't believe her!" That soon changed. By 2008, Swift was more assured. She knew people, and especially teenage girls, looked up to her. She established her own all-female crew, the Murder Mams, with herself behind the decks. She inspired a new generation of Baltimore club queens, like Rye Rye, who has just inked a deal with MIA's label. MIA herself hosted Swift's posthumous mix *Jumpoff: Greatest Hits*. The legend is already growing. "Everyone has their own ways of remembering her," finishes Buck. "We're going to bring the Baltimore club scene to prominence. Her legacy will never be in vain."

**'She was for the people.
She never shunned anyone.
She always had time'**





man of duty

Words: **Jesse Darlin'**

Photography: **Cat Stevens**

Searching for a cure for the human condition: a tender hour, in a rented room, with **Bonnie 'Prince' Billy**

I tell my housemate I'm to be granted an audience with the Prince. "Oh yeah?" she says. "Wow." She's a big fan, followed him for years. She's got loads of his records, and the dude's *prolific*. "He got me through two relationships, did old Will Oldham," she tells me, and offers to rip some CDs for me. "Sometimes sad music is really healing," she says as she hands them over. And smiles.

Me, I haven't got any Bonnie 'Prince' Billy CDs. Maybe an old mix-tape with some Tortoise on it. It's not that I don't *like* Bonnie 'Prince' Billy. It was just that I was always somewhere else, or that my crew were all listening to other stuff, or I never had that one new lover who put a whole bunch of 'Prince' Billy on a mix for me so that we could listen to those dark dulcet tones while we lay doing all that love and mellow drama, soft in the hurt. In retrospect, it's a real bummer: still, better late than never. I spend the whole week inside the words of Bonnie 'Prince' Billy. There are consistent themes. I fancy I spot certain narratives being played out. There is darkness, "soul-death", the endless cycles of things: in and out of love, in and out of the light. Listening to the oeuvre somewhat chronologically, I feel like the Prince and I are on a journey. It's a road I've travelled before, but not like this; I know these places – know them well – but on this long dark road I'm no longer walking alone, and the song guides the way home, home where the heart is.

There's a book by Rogan P Taylor called *The Death And Resurrection Show* which traces the history of shamanism into showbiz, its modern equivalent; the author claims that the shaman acts as the "sacred clown", or the cipher through which the underworld comes streaming, screaming, all darkness transformed into light – stage lights – the music, the ancient storytelling rite. The shaman is fundamentally a healer, but also given to sickness and madness of his own. "The shaman's sickness is, in reality, *everybody's* sickness..." The shaman's initial problem is, then, a concentrated version of the general human problem. His subsequent self-cure is... *a cure for the human condition itself.*"

cursed sleep

When I meet Will Oldham, it's in a hotel room: he's lying on the bed with his boots on, doing the crossword. The bed is a grey box in a grey cube; everything looks as though it's made of textured carpet. He's hairy and scruffy and fleshy-lipped and slightly grizzled-looking – utterly incongruous – and in all honesty, so am I. "This whole process is pretty strange, quite frankly," he says, referring to me, the press, the hotel, the whole shebang, as he gets up from the bed. They bring him six cans of beer and I feel like asking if we can't just crack 'em open and get into it, but they're for later, for when all interviews are over, for the crossword and for the darkness at end of day. I'm nervous. It shows. I stammer something about not having come across his work in the past except recently because I've got a limited radar.

"That's all right," he smiles. He's being kind. "I've got a limited radar too."

Listening to the Bonnie 'Prince' Billy catalogue, sometimes it sounds as though it's the man Will Oldham speaking; sometimes it's someone else, perhaps a woman (the ancient shamans, masters of transformation, were also known to don the garb of a woman on occasion, channelling their own "spirit-wives") and sometimes they're universal hymns, incantations, summons; calling to the spirits and to the tribe to raise their own voices alongside: "*A song that I am and you/ Sing me back into myself/ When I wake, when I'm sleeping/ the song is a man and a woman/ And everything else.*" I ask him if the lyrics are directly autobiographical.

"It depends. Sometimes, but then I think, well, how could this thing turn into a song that somebody else could sing, or somebody else could listen to and think that this is something that applies to him or her?"

They're pretty universal themes, I say, but *Lie Down In The Light* sounds like the kind of album someone writes when they're in love, and then *Beware* sounds like that love has started to fray a bit at the seams.

'I try to get to where I feel like the song has some muscle to it, and then I just sort of push it out of the nest'

The Prince looks at me sagely. "I can't say that there are certain parallels between that record and my personal life. For example, on this last record there are two duets – one is about coming together and one is about coming apart."

Why is it called *Beware*?, I ask.

The Prince is silent for a while. "Maybe because I was unsure of the forces that might have crept in during the assembling of the songs, so I thought it would be good to put it right out front so that people would be a little bit tender with it, a little bit careful."

There's a lot of ambivalence on this new record, I say; some balls-out alley-cat defiance, 'I Don't Belong To Anyone' ("That's a good way to describe it," says Will), some sadness, a fragile hope. And there's also some soaring melodies in celebration of the wide-open horizon afforded by the absolute freedom of loneliness.

"Yeah, a lot of uncertainty maybe. But it's really all in the ear of the beholder."

Sure it is. Of course it is: that's the songwriter's gift to his listener. But when you write a song, I ask Will Oldham, do you think about – do you care – how someone might interpret that song, or do you just let it fly away and go where it will?

"I try to get to where I feel like the song has some muscle to it; that it can withstand a little bit of pummelling, and then I just sort of push it out of the nest."

And has anyone ever really missed the point of a song?

"How can they? I mean, if someone really hates a song then I think, well, that song wasn't for them and they've missed the point, but if someone's bought the record and has spent the time listening to it, then the point is their point; it's their song, it's their record."

So you don't have any kind of an agenda, as a performing figure, to stand up and deliver any kind of message?

"If there is that agenda, it's just about the act of communication between us on this side of the music and the people on the listening side; just to identify that a communication exists and that there's some kind of connection when sometimes we miss those connections, and feel a little bit bereft or adrift when we can't sense or feel those connections. If there is an agenda it's about identifying them, or even building them, you know? Getting a little ambitious and saying, here's an idea, and I'm gonna try to make a song that presents this idea in such

a way that you might even enjoy listening to it, which you might not have thought possible."

Not an agenda, then, so much as a calling. There it is again, the mediation between this side and the other side; the healing transformation that comes of the spirit channelled through music. Is it to fill your own void, Will Oldham, or is it to give voice to the silence? To reach out to others in their darkest hour, all the way through that 'Grand Dark Feeling of Emptiness' to the other side, to the light?

"Well, anyone who can identify with that song, you know, we want 'em on our team. And that song might be a song that can serve a purpose at a time when the listener might feel purposeless. And if they can find a connection to that song then they might be able to find a connection to another song, which is another step further away from that purposeless feeling."

So you do it for them? And not for you?

"No, both. Cos I need it, you know? If nobody listened to the music there wouldn't be any connection made. Fortunately, at this point I've started to have some degree of an awareness of that community by making records and travelling around and meeting people at shows or whatever; or getting a letter every now and then."



What, people who cite you as an influence, saying that your stuff has moved them along their own musical or personal journey?

"Right. And by doing that, they're doing the same thing for me that they claim that I'm doing for them."

Anyone you can name?

"No, just musicians, or anyone who sends a letter, or a little thing that they've made, like a little sculpture or a drawing or a painting or a song, but oftentimes just a letter, you know? Or a note. A single sentence."

I tell the Prince what my flatmate said about having got through two relationships with the help of his records. If your intention was to communicate the incommunicable with those who feel silenced, I say, then you've been successful. He nods; he knows, but knows how to take a compliment with dignity.

"In musical ways as well. A melody can be put together in such a way that another musician won't feel restricted, you know, because a lot of times people are trying to restrict the possibilities of what you can think or do or play or sing."

On Will Oldham's Wikipedia entry there's a quote by someone who claims that Bonnie 'Prince

Billy' doesn't rehearse, as such. He just goes into the studio with the singers and musicians and does it.

Is that true, I ask. Is that what you mean?

"It's not quite true. Everyone knows the structure of the song, they know the basic melody, they know all the lyrics, and everyone is somewhat able to listen and improvise. That's what they do. I guess for me the thrill of recording something is to record the sounds of people playing off each other and listening to each other and reacting to each other. I often find the unique power of recording equipment is that it actually can capture something as it's happening, something that's never happened before."

So you're looking for the entropic, the momentary quality?

"I'm looking to hear the things we don't get to hear. We don't get to hear how these musicians came together. Well, here you can hear what happened when I played this and this person played that or vice versa, or if this person gives this foundation for the vocal melody. I'm really fond of this last record I made. They were recorded in my house and it just sounds like three people in a room."

What's the instrumentation?

"That would be acoustic guitar, electric guitar and some violin."

No drums or anything?

"No drums, no."

Will Oldham doesn't use drums a lot. It's radical. We've always been told that the drum is the basic bottom line, the punctuation to the storytelling; without that stiff backbone the music takes on an organic quality, inhabiting the soft spaces of the psyche.

"I have a very difficult relationship with a drum kit," he says. "It's like this choo-choo train force; at this point in the song you're like, let's open it, let's change it, let's slow it down, and then it's like, WHAT? CAN'T HEAR YOU! I like hand drums a lot, though. On *Lie Down In The Light* we used a lot of hand drums, just sitting in a very small circle and we could play and sing. Hand drums or gourds and shakers."

So when you're all there, I say, and you feel like it's time to break it down a bit, do you just look at everyone to give them the cue – the maestro in his house – or do you agree beforehand? How do you *know*?

"People are listening to each other. You take a cue from whoever takes the lead at a given

moment. I mean, someone might drop out and you think, ohhhh...that sounds goooood. And you'll drop out too."

So how many takes do you usually do?

"Anything from one to ten or twelve, depending on the song."

Do you know immediately if it's the right one?

"You kinda know, but it's mysterious... sometimes we'll play it and it'll be like, yeah, but let's do it again. And then we'll do it again and one of the five of us will be like yeah, that's it, that's the one; and the rest of us will be like, I don't know... and then we'll go back in and listen to both of them and we might all say, yeah, we had it the first time."

I imagine the shaman in séance, in session, in a circle of voices. Here leading, there following, now lifting, then falling. You make it sound like a group process, I say.

"I worked on writing the songs for a long time alone, going over them and going over them, and then this time is all about sharing and figuring it out with other people."

On *Beware* there's a crazy moment at which a flute appears and dances across the song's horizon like a ghost of the air; there's a horn somewhere, there's even a synth. Did you write the song with those sounds in mind, or was it all circumstantial, I ask, half-knowing the answer already.

"No. I try to put the songs together without any instrumentation in mind at all."

I thought he'd say that, too. I'm starting to get the picture; I'm starting to get what's so special about Will Oldham. In an age in which needlepoint musical precision is possible and prevalent – the sleek beats of robo-tronica, programmed by



Figuring out email is one thing, but the whole changing of people's musical landscapes and social landscapes happens so quickly; it can feel like you're building a community, but you're potentially distancing someone who's two years ahead or two years behind you. Where it used to be a record, a cassette and a compact disc; now you can get it on iTunes and play it on your iPod or Zune, you can

always remained true to the human aspect, to his own long and – probably – hard road. I could sit and drink beer with the guy all night; maybe at some point he'd pull out a guitar and we could harmonise some, see what comes out. But home is far away, and I'm there with my notebook on the other side of the music. We shake hands. How many more of these do you have to do? I ask.

'The unique power of recording equipment is that it actually can capture something as it's happening, something that's never happened before'

a computer to sound clean and infallible, this guy's made a science of harnessing the moment, at once capturing and letting soar the free bird of music. And in his voice, even after all these years, there's something of awe for the process, which is greater than the sum of its parts, which is older than Oldham and universal like the feeling of emptiness and the fear of death and the lightness of love. This is noteworthy and wonderful in such accelerated, tech-happy times. We talk, the Prince and I, about the difference between MP3s and vinyl (for the record, Oldham listens to MP3s on the road, but never at home, although he loves "organising music in these big ways, making a playlist by three artists and there's nine records interplaying with each other. I try to arrange songs like in a way that I'd be compelled by their juxtaposition"); we talk about the "poor bad songs" that can be left off a playlist without the ceremonial hassle of skipping a track on vinyl or cassette; about recording equipment, about the 'lo-fi' label that has become synonymous with the man and his music.

"You know, I used to be really insulted when somebody would say something was lo-fi, because we would try the best we could to make it sound good, and then when other people would say, like, 'Oh, they used really crappy recording equipment to make this shitty-sounding record', we'd think like, wait a minute! We really tried!"

There's even a line somewhere on *Beware* about empty inbox syndrome: "I open the awful machine to nothing." Are the machines awful, I ask? All of them?

"Well, a factor of it – I was gonna say a problem, but that's pessimistic – is that it changes so much.

torrent it, you can Napster it, Pandora, last.fm... there's little common technology. And it's kind of neat, but it does help to separate us a little more."

my life's work

And that's not what it's all about, according to Bonnie Prince Billy: it's about reaching across the gaps between us, giving voice to the spirit, healing the sickness of the heart. I get it, now. Will Oldham is, and has always been, a passionately human artist who would seek and find the moment of entropy, the sacred synergy, at the heart of the music. The sound of people listening to each other, he calls it, but perhaps it's the sound of the silence, the darkness, the Other, listening at the door. Waiting to enter, but kept in check by the song. The labels came later: lo-fi, roots, acoustic, whatever. "I don't care about the technology," he says. "It's good, it's bad, it doesn't matter." Fidelity has a double meaning, of course; Oldham has

"A few," he grins, showing teeth. "It's really rough, really rough."

But he knows it's one of the shaman's duties to deliver this stuff unto the disciples. Humble and thoroughly human, Will Oldham is nonetheless a man who understands the nature of his calling, to provide a service. For his own good, and for ours.

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy *Beware* (Domino)

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy has always sounded ancient. There's scant dispute that 1999's *I See A Darkness* is his pinnacle, when he sounded old and tired, deep in thought, after thought, after thought. But Will Oldham's got younger with time, and he's changed his tack.

2008's *Lie Down In The Light* was chirpy. He ain't returning to where he came from. ... *Darkness* was a decade ago, and happiness has ebbed and flowed since then. The beard has fluctuated. The hair is going, going, gone. Since, collaborations have been many, and *Beware* is no exception.

His main band uses Town And Country and Cairo Gang members, and Wilco, the Mekons and Exploding Star Orchestra peeps pop up. Everything sounds complete and perfect. 'Heart's Arms' is deepened with cello and violin, Bonnie's gorgeous voice strains: "Why don't you write me anymore?/Have you

found something as good, just next door?" "I Don't Belong To Anyone", a neat country twang, puts his delicate vocal on a pedestal: "There's no one who'll take care of me/It's kind of easy to have some fun/When you don't belong to anyone." There's no voice like Bonnie's in any land, no lyrics either. Moods may shift, but a self-deprecating, sexual humour prevails. "In a pit of bodies, I am loved by all/By ham hock, by handkerchief/By damsel and by doll," he sings on 'Death Final', while 'You Don't Love Me' winks "You don't love me, but that's alright/Because you can do me all through the night".

But what might come across as crude in the hands of another is charming in the mouth of the Bonnie 'Prince'. Because no one else alive sings romance like Bonnie, so driven is he by a love that may or may not come. He's as soothing as a cradle holding a baby. The title is a warning: nothing lasts forever. Nothing is certain. *Beware* is just what's happening now.

Tom Howard



tanz musik

Words: **Pil and Galia Kollektiv**

Born out of the experimental flux of late Seventies Düsseldorf, DAF honed industrial heat and primitive electronics into a raw, brutalist dance music of sinewy physicality and heated provocation. On the eve of their first London show in 25 years, *Plan B* meets Robert Görl and Gabi Delgado-Lopez to talk contradiction, conflict and new directions

Celebrating Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft's 30th birthday feels pretty weird. Will we ever get used to the life cycle of the avant-garde, the movement that matures, the market that absorbs it, the contradictions that pave the way for the next movement? Should we agree with Boris Groys that museums are useful only as cemeteries, archiving failed revolutions? Shouldn't we burn the records of the ones we admire most instead of compiling/re-mastering/re-mixing? Shouldn't we resist self-mythologising – the pseudo-authenticity of moments which seemed insignificant or even pathetic when they first occurred, but became seminal when reproduced as commodity (think of the half-empty country and western bar turned CBGB T-shirt, or the drunken, studenty performances of Romanian immigrants that became the Cabaret Voltaire retrospective at the MoMA)?

On the other hand, maybe turning 30 is simply another turn of the screw in the career of a band that made its name by employing contradictions, conflict and antagonism. Just as DAF decided to disappear for a while at the height of their momentum, following their trilogy of records spanning 1981 to 1982 – or their reaction to being hailed as founding fathers of the sparse, industrial EBM scene: by producing only slick club pop throughout the mid Eighties – the band now want to signal that being revered by everyone from industrial goths to electroclashers is not a good enough reason to stop working on new directions. Talking to Robert and Gabi over Skype, it soon

becomes clear that DAF were always aware of the contradictions inherent in every progressive moment in the history of music. They loved the dynamism of early punk, the democratisation of music production, and the de-professionalisation of the music business. But they simply couldn't understand why the punks insisted on playing the same instruments as their fathers, why the change was limited to re-inventing an already existing genre.

Robert: "We liked the idea of punk music as a free form. But we didn't like the music itself, the guitars and the fact that it sounds just like the old rock. It didn't make sense that people used the old instruments, so we took what we wanted from punk, the energy and attitude, but not the music. We wanted to combine it with the music of the future – electronic music."

Gabi: "We were more influenced by Donna Summer and Giorgio Moroder, Suicide, Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk. But people today can't imagine what it was like making music before punk. If you wanted to make music you thought: 'I must study music, I must go to a studio that costs a thousand pounds a day, I need a producer'. And all of a sudden it was like learn three chords, and if you had a good idea you didn't need education, a producer, money, just a cheap studio. If you don't have a label – make your own."

Recently, Uli Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex* followed the process of radicalisation that Ulrike Meinhof went through, from Sixties hippy activist to revolutionary terrorist. Trying to unpack the logic of European terror, the movie illustrates how the ethos of mediated violence,

meant to shake the bourgeoisie into recognition of their own complacency, was rooted in Sixties counterculture. The years between the late Sixties and the mid Seventies form the cultural space that punk traversed so quickly by making explicit the inherent violence and reactionary individualism the hippy ideal contained. In this respect, it's interesting to follow the evolution of the DAF sound from their 1979 debut to the highly polished trilogy of *Alles Ist Gut*, *Gold Und Liebe* and *Für Immer*, to see how the band negotiated the impossible truce between the openness and experimentation of Krautrock and the crude minimalism of punk, eventually betraying both. If punk was an ugly version of what the counterculture wanted to hide from itself, DAF were the horrible truth that punk did not dare utter. It took the band a few years to find its style, says Robert, and musically their first recordings were an experiment to find a way out of rock formula, but also out of the soft, folkly side of Krautrock. The debut EP, 22 instrumental fragments over 30 minutes, sounds like an allergic reaction to music in the late Seventies, a spitting out of poisonous material to prepare for the tight industrial pop of the albums that followed.

Robert: "Because of punk we decided in the early stages of the band to go to London. We were hanging out in Portobello Road outside the Rough Trade shop. Daniel Miller found us there and he was about to release his first single on Mute, *The Normal*. People in the shop used to say, 'What are these fucking Germans doing out here?' We had no money and were trying to ask, in a very open or outspoken way, for a place to



stay from the people in Rough Trade. And they did. Some of us were actually staying with Daniel Miller's mum. I lived for three years in London. We had our first gigs there and that's where we released our first album, *Die Kleinen Und Die Bösen*, half of which was recorded live at the Electric Ballroom."

When the band returned to Germany to work with Krautrock legend Conny Plank, they found it to be fertile ground for scandal. DAF managed to make everyone into enemies. They enraged both right and left because of their use of Fascism as a theme for a dance song in 'Der Mussolini'. When Gabi sings "*Dance the Mussolini*", it is impossible to determine his level of engagement to – or distance from – Fascism. Is it meant as a joke? Is it an implicit critique of the rise of neo-Fascism in Europe? Can we really use Hitler as a purely aesthetic sound, as meaningless as a 'da doo ron-ron'? Even worse was explicit gay love fantasy 'Der Räuber Und Der Prinz', a determinedly un-subtle treatment of a taboo, set to a non-cuddly, but strangely catchy, fairytale tune. The band always resisted literal interpretations of their songs. No, they weren't a couple and the song wasn't about their relationship, they kept telling journalists. Most disturbing perhaps was 'Kebabträume', an early song also recorded by Mittagspause as 'Militürk'. For the most part the song sounds like a right-wing rant about the Turks taking over Europe, a persuasive replication of paranoid racism, except for the last line, which declares, in a messianic tone, "*We are the Turks of the future!*" "The song is about Turks being spies – it's a funny spy story", says Robert, avoiding our attempts to understand the song's political implications. "No, really, it's about espionage!"

However, controversy was always integral to DAF, and if their sexual politics confused people across the political map, this fit right in with the kind of challenge to post-war liberalism first posed by punk: "We were always been accused of being Nazis. In the early Eighties we had already started to take the piss out of the media. We started playing a game with them and they followed. We liked playing games. Our favorite was 'Hit Or Shit'. We'd sit in a café and when people came along we judged if they were hit or shit. We were very young. We looked at how the person walked, the attitude. It was pretty shitty, playing 'Hit Or Shit'."

Have all the taboos have been broken? Could the same games be played today?

Robert: "I'm not sure Germany today is more liberal. The media is still pretty conservative. We like

more tolerant, but it's not that its spirit has changed. Rather the institutions – the state, the church – are losing power, and allow more tolerance. Sex is still a taboo. Religion is still a taboo and is getting more and more so. People can make jokes about the Catholic church, but nobody dares joking about Islam because it is too dangerous, so people don't touch it, even though it is a totalitarian religion."

While Gabi is right on some level about the sensitivity of religion in contemporary discourse, we find this statement disturbing. It seems DAF at 30 haven't lost their ability to shock. However, as he emphasises, breaking taboos and shaking people up was only ever one aspect of what they did.

Gabi: "It's also entertainment and excitement. As George Clinton said: 'Free your ass and your mind will follow'. That still works."

Can you identify anyone today who manages to challenge and entertain?

Gabi: "Of course there is still a lot of great stuff, not just in techno, but in hip-hop, for example. I just wish there were alternatives – not internet companies, owned by American firms. People

don't have new ideas anymore. It's easier to recycle. In the Seventies, new technological developments, the computer and synth, led people to adapt to what was possible. Whenever there are new technologies, a new form of art is born. The guy who invented the printing machine has done a more important job than Shakespeare. The person who invented the piano is more important than Chopin."

'Whenever there are new technologies, a new form of art is born'

to break open things, to play with fire and to break down dogmas about sexual political and religious identity. Religion, especially in relation to Islam, is still a strong taboo in Europe".

Gabi: "I agree with Robert that taboos are still possible to break now. The old things, like Nazism and gay sex are still controversial, but there are also new ones now. Western society in general is maybe

live

Peaks and troughs and peaks and troughs

days and nights with everett true

Afirampo Photo: Justin Edwards

Let's start with the dancing shoes.

Running rampant at **ATP Mount Buller**: keyed up like they ain't been keyed up for years, Warren Ellis grabbing me round the shoulders and saying, "It's a privilege to be watching **The Laughing Clowns** with you, Everett", keenly anticipating every exclamatory, fiery Louise Elliott sax break, pogoing when Jeffery Wegener's rollicking roustabout of a beat becomes too dizzy (particularly during 'Theme From Mad Flies, Mad Flies'), resting a strapped-up knee (caused by walking up one too many ski slopes) during a mightily melancholy 'Collapse Board', kicking sideways during 'Everything That Flies' like so many Japanese Stereo Total fans, throbbing with barely-contained excitement while the out-there jazz-splattered intro to 'The Flypaper' builds with claustrophobic density, spasming uncontrollably during an extended 'Eternally Yours', guitarist Ed Kuepper creating an inclement wall of sound to match even Neil Young at his most ragged, thinking back two

decades previous when I last caught this band, always antagonistic, always challenging, throwing in far too many horn breaks and sax solos to be accepted by yr average Birthday Party fan (read: Goth), these songs being my own personal soundtrack...

Let's continue with the dancing shoes.

Running wicked at **ATP Brisbane**: buoyed like they ain't been buoyed for weeks, Oni of **Afirampo** tapping me on the shoulders and instructing me to carry her through the audience so she can continue singing her joyful, feral chant up close, the crowd's faces painted with delight and awe, bouncing around as the drum kicks another wanton flurry of exhibitionism, feet tapping as Pika and Oni start call and response, hurrying as the guitar races through several shades of Acid Mothers Temple and Sixties garage band The Rats, overwhelmed at the generosity of spirit, the sparseness, the noise level, the peaks and troughs and peaks and troughs and peaks and troughs, kicking to three sides like so many female Jeremy Jay fans, ignoring the sweat making a matted mess of hair and face, guitar a siren of sound like Kim Gordon at her most rampant, thinking back a decade previous and

realising this is what I believed Huggy Bear sounded like, but way too fun and magical to be ignored by any but the most dunderheaded of macho assholes, these songs being my own personal nirvana...

Let's end with the dancing shoes.

Running happy at Laneway Brisbane: driven like they ain't been driven for days, the weight of bad fucking bad Australian and indie rock lifted from my shoulders where they'd been dragging them down, rounded, **The Drones** sarcastic and snide and alert and burning into the warm evening air, songs visibly shaking at the seams, bass monitors and guitar pedals cutting out, Dan concussing Michael when he hits the cymbal once too often, Fiona rolling her eyes, her back to the crowd, Gareth hurling his mic stand and guitar, giving up and passing vocal duties around, 'The Minotaur' brutally brilliantly alive...and I'm thinking back like, fuck, 25 years back, and thinking, fuck yeah, this band understands rock's fundamental mantra – remember the three S's, spontaneity, spontaneity, spontaneity...and fuck, yeah fuck, this band are greater than...

Let's end with the dancing shoes.

Babi-chin

Brudenell Social Club, Leeds

The fog of apathy clears. No more polite handclaps. No more backache, cock-eyed spine. No more crushing can in hand, consider slicing face off with jagged edge. No more boredom.

It's Babi-chin, the little brother of Chincillafest. And **Beards**. Are back. In town. Beards are disgustingly fun: a blaze of lycra and vitriol. They are fierce and determined and their Devo-meets-Erase Errata song-monsters push the party dance into languishing legs.

Picore bring it down an octave or two. Polite gestures between songs, in broken

Spanglish, do little to soften the blow as they splice through lungs and spleen with their gutsy, melodious hardcore. Guitars change hands a thousand times and as vocalist Abuelo cradles his mic, fear and threat are radiating from his eyes.

A change in beat and tone reveals **Indica Ritual**. Performative and perky, like their hometown counterparts and personnel-sharers aPAT, they pick and prod at Jagstang and keys, tip-toe dancing in rainbow clobber. The highlight is 'My Night Tangle', supreme English pop of the highest order: spatters of Kate Bush, Duran Duran and Jarvis Cocker's arching eyebrow decorating our microsphere.

What started out as something of a non-event ends in a sublime cataclysm, when **Cleckhuddersfax** steam-roll through the pack, making mincemeat of our collective inhibitions. With his vocal effects box strapped across his chest like a cyborg's satchel, Lawrence plays lyrical hopscotch over his bandmates' prog patterns – demented and dashing, a human splash of lycra (more lycra!) and vocoded party sermons. The crowd is a jagged blur. Limbs, digits and hair all thrash and whirl: a mass sacrificial offering of the final dregs of self-consciousness.

Hayley Avron

Ben Butler And Mousepad

Brudenell Social Club, Leeds

Ben Butler And Mousepad is the brand spanking nom de plume of one half of the Scottish nonsense-pop duo Gay Against You. He is also both halves of Germlin. You may remember him from that time you partook in a frenetic conga with him around your local independent-minded gig venue, or guffawing with abandon as him and his GAY band-buddy trade inter-song banter like disses in an MC battle. You may remember him, you may not. Either way, just don't call him Ben.

Joe Howe occupies the stage looking like a severely emaciated Frankie Boyle,

The songs crumble into ambience



sounds like nothing

Words: **Pil and Galia Kollektiv**
Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

US Girls

Old Blue Last, London

Braving the snow to come out tonight, we knew this was going to be an adventure, but didn't expect to be swallowed up in a time warp. You know that moment in trashy films where a flashback is preceded by (or ends in) some Fifties or Sixties music that reverberates into a whirlpool of sound, signifying the lapse of time? US Girls' music is that moment drawn out to an *entire film*, like the *Titanic* crashing over and over again into the iceberg.

Standing alone on stage in a leotard and jeans, with just a few effect pedals and what looks like a custom-built old amp, Megan Remy, the band's sole member, launches into a cover of the Kinks' 'Days' sung from the end

of time with what could be a cement mixer for accompaniment. Eschewing the obvious trick of all-synth-and-no-soul cover versions, this near-karaoke injects more emotion into the song than the original, more Suicide than Flying Lizards and that still doesn't come close.

This formula is incredibly, simply and shockingly original, a take on pop history that sounds like nothing else. Despite the heavy blanket of John Dwyer-worthy effects over Remy's voice and the deliberately modest presentation, there is something funny and disturbing about the songs that bring to mind the Residents at their best. At certain moments, the songs crumble into ambience, then further into a series of noises without meaning. But then Remy somehow picks them up with her microphone as if they were feathers and collects them together into a tail that drags behind her disembodied vocals by just a few inches. Like the peacock, it's hard

to say if the tail is the essence of the bird or a crippling hindrance: the music and vocals very rarely touch but always remain aware of each other, always just a quarter tone apart.

On the way home after the gig, the buses are running again and we're lucky enough to catch one after only a short wait, still with a few drops of hot brandy that we pre-packed in a thermos in anticipation of a long icy walk home and a shortage of well equipped San Bernard dogs. For once, we learn to appreciate the deep silence of a city under siege. The weird sounds of US Girls keep playing in our heads. Is this the future of the city after the demise of the petrol engine? Will all the cities of the near future be filled only with the electric low hum of a Toyota Prius? Will this silence change music, will we be able to hear more or less? Would all noise music sound like that remote echo from the cinematic flashback?

one hand on hip and pushing his thick-rimmed glasses back towards his eyes with the other. Wandering over to his keyboards, he has the deceptive air of a man unused to the task of entertaining a crowd of semi-static humans.

Musically, Ben Butler is as neat as Joe's moustache. Disco rhythms meld into Seventies cop show theme tunes, bursting from his Korg to rattle the onlookers, many of whom are making moves somewhere on the verge of dancing. It's all a lot more concise and structured than Germlin, or

Gay Against You, and visually there's a lot less to grab hold of. I guess he's just busy with all that keyboard trickery for too much eye contact. With a flourish, he shakes the last drops of noise from his hair and leaves the stage with a humble thank you. No conga, no nothing.

Hayley Avron

Emeralds

Luminaire, London

Emeralds make music to get lost in. As anyone who's spun their recent

Solar Bridge and/or *What Happened* can tell you, theirs is a luxuriously blissful blanket cut from the same cosmic cloth as Cluster and Popol Vuh, ideally designed for hypnagogic states. But tonight the trio aren't hitting the same meditative peaks. This is a safety-first performance, dwelling on burbling sprees of warm analogue, a slowly undulating series of rolling waves nudged nervously into Harmonia territory by Mark McGuire's Michael Rother-esque guitar licks.

It might be the tireless chattering pack of hyenas at the bar, or the self-conscious restraint of the performers on stage, but something vital is missing. Where's the temporal suspension that I feel as I crank up 'The Quaking Mess' or 'Disappearing Ink' in the confines of my bedroom? It splinters in a moment as another plastic glass shatters under some Klutz's foot and, again, I'm awoken to my surroundings. Take-off postponed.

Spencer Grady

Hugging a zeitgeist



catch fire

Words: **Tom Howard**

November Fleet photo: **Simon Fernandez**

Ladyfest Goldsmiths

Goldsmiths University, London

Ladyfest is under-attended. This might have mattered if everyone wasn't here for a reason, to be part of something. That's already widely appreciated, isn't it? Every note twanged, skin thwacked, poem uttered or copy of *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* sold is backed up with purpose, reason and cause. It means everything to everyone here.

The large, wooden-floored Stretch (Goldsmiths University's hive of counterculture-appreciating activity) has an aura of warmth. It's an attractive room, dimly lit with dark walls. And it takes **November Fleet**, at their debut show, no time to fill the space with sound.

Fledgling enough to have an empty MySpace (decorated with an elegant pirate ship) they have, at worst, promise. Their off-key harmonies are a charmingly deliberate ploy to fleck their Sleater-Kinney loving pop-punk with leftfield obscurity. They flit between genres like an unfocused rabble. But why the hell would they have focus? They'll grow. And next time they won't rely on power-drumming and shouting.

Nothing similar applies to **Docker MC**, a brasher Kate Nash with sparkier syntax. Sitting on a stool with half of her dark hair cut short, she spits lively, wordy poetry from memory. She loves The Smiths and ain't afraid to show it. Her real name is Laura Duckworth and she's hugging a zeitgeist.

As are **Betty And The Werewolves**, who win the Ladyfest award for Band Most Like Vivian Girls. Pleasingly, they're superb. Dirtier live than on record, they're speedy, lo-fi and muffled, and have cheeky and cute guitar spats. You have to dance. Their drummer is the first boy playing on stage, and Sir Dancelot Douglas' beats are perfectly rushed. It gives the quartet a loveable urgency, White Stripes solos and jolty Deerhoof breakdowns. 'Wind Up', about "violent kissing" is their best three minutes. Concise, smart and sharp.

But not as sharp as the point of Rachel Mary Callaghan's stiletto heel. She, the fireball who fronts doomy art-punks **Kasms**, could break every bone in your body, red hair running riot in ripped black denim over ex-Test Icicle Rory Brattwell's rhythms. But he's not the star. Callaghan's takes that accolade as Black Sabbath riffs ease into scratchy, dangerous, ominous guitars that give Callaghan the confidence to work Ladyfest up to climax.

Barely anyone is left for **Das Wanderlust**, humble victims of a headline slot starting long after the last trains have rolled out of New Cross. Their keyboard, glockenspiel and drum combos are unloved. They're a minimalist Los Campesinos! with none of the twee. They bleep. They pop. They bop like The Research. Leader Laura Simmons jabbers nervous nonsense between songs. They'll have other chances. Ladyfest is Rachel Mary Callaghan's. She's the only lady in Kasms. But her noise is loudest of all.

Men Of Unitus/Holy State

The Oakford Social Club, Reading

The morning after some heavy birthday celebrations, and a return to my hometown is fast becoming an emotionally torrid affair. Street lights bleed, unforgiving, into my dilated pupils. But Holy State take my mental trauma and channel it back into blocks of crushing noise, with a dark-force menace reminiscent of the Jesus Lizard. Confrontational yet uncalculated, gracefully aggressive and with a penchant for flicking the bird at any Sherman-shirted alcho-noon that dares to try and invade their space, the band race through a 30-minute set that leaves all in the strangles of punk aggression.

Men Of Unitus extend meta and physical spatial boundaries further, with the band employing shirtless howling and an ability to inspire depravity in those

within a five-foot radius. Their set ends with band members being pushed around the venue on leather sofas, having served to unite us all.

Ben Webster

Wolves In The Throne Room

Underworld, London

The thought of experiencing ambient black metal live prompts a certain cognitive dissonance. Sure, the whole wave of ultra lo-fi BM, propelled through a mist of tape hiss, has found its own niche amongst metal fans. No enterprising longhair, however, has yet succeeded in making a fetish of the sort of bad-PA sound that moulds every instrument together into a mulch of gelatinous gloop.

But while there are moments tonight when Wolves In The Throne Room, for all their shaking torsos and frenetic fretboard manoeuvres, sound like little more

than a surging tide of sludge pursued by a lynch mob of angry war drums, there's a deftness to what they do, too. Absent of the corpse-paint as beloved of their Norwegian kin, instead adopting a more Crass-like, anarcho-tinged visual aesthetic in line with modern US black metal, twin guitarists Nathan Weaver and Will Lindsay build to melodic, strangely wistful peaks. When they do extend claws and go for the jugular – Weaver's hoarse screams set against lashed cymbals and jagged eruptions – it's with a savagery that feels intensified by what came before.

Louis Pattison

Zombie-Zombie

Madame Jojo's, London

Zombie-Zombie are late. It's frustrating. Cosmic Neman – aka Neman Herman Dune and his partner in tribal electro-

wizardry, Etienne Jaumet – clamber on stage and yelp and pound the drums like nothing's happened. Nothing has happened, really.

But they are late. And it is frustrating. No one seems to mind though. Madame Jojo's pit sways and grinds and wiggles. It's testament to Zombie-Zombie's unjerky approach to a set. Their seamless songs flow like a river. Detractors would call it 'samey'. Fans would call it dedication to a cause. It's certainly the latter, to a cause of gentle mind-altering and the following of a bleepy instinct. It couldn't be further from the cute folk of Neman's other band. He's clearly a man of eclectic tastes. A man who likes squeaking like a dog while his buddy tweaks switches.

They were late though. And it's late now. And it's fucking freezing outside.

Tom Howard

A kind of inverse New Age music

ghosts and the city

Words: **Frances Morgan**

Atilla Csihar photo: **Mani Thomasson**

Howl Of The Owl/Raster-Noton.Rythm_Screen at Club Transmediale

Maria Am Ostbahnhof, Berlin

In one room, light and movement – a lush but unforgiving digital palette that shifts and pulses as sonic data is cut and stretched with microscopic finesse; new and impersonal. In another, impermeable darkness: visceral drones that rise and fall in black waves from strings and amplifiers and cavernous throats.

Except that music is never that simple, and there are more cross-currents here than CTM's bill at first makes apparent – the night as a whole is in fact exemplary of CTM's mission statement to explore electronic music in all its permutations. Both the avant-doom represented by tonight's Howl Of The Owl lineup and the ascetic techno of the Raster-Noton label work and re-work formulae of bass and space; and with more subtle configurings of alienation and human involvement than their surface signifiers of laptops or guitars imply.

In the small space set aside for Raster-Noton's 'Rhythm Screen' (a light and mirror-based installation which responds to the patterns in the music), bodies are rammed, stopped from dancing only by the lack of space, and the feeling is of a party or ritual, albeit one trapped inside a Macbook. Byetone and SND's warm glitch-noise seems to burrow into the club's bunker-like walls, forming connections with the building's accumulation of human energy. Back in Maria Am Ostbahnhof's main room, Swiss/Canadian quartet **Monno** mould drums, bass, treated sax and laptop-based electronics into stately, dense drones, punctuated with bass riffs and hard-to-place noise textures. It is not just the audio processing that renders their set slightly

disconnected – like a few of their better-known contemporaries, Monno strip metal of its obvious personal content, treating it as sonic source material for manufacturing vast, almost post-human landscapes. When this works, it's sublime, but by sticking at scalp-squeezing volume throughout, Monno forego the dynamic subtlety that would make their riff monoliths all the more effective.

Performing a new solo work for voice, Mayhem vocalist and SunnO))) collaborator **Attila Csihar**'s candle-lit set is a welcome contrast, building from susurrant near-silence through overtones and growls into full-throated roars that, briefly, transform the club into a cathedral. Csihar's monkish cowl, along with the loop-based structure of the piece, enhances the impression that – like it or not – perhaps what we're all captivated by is a kind of inverse New Age music; the composition certainly has the feel of ambient or devotional recordings, and the black metal rasp is softened by the electronic repetitions. Many solo artists understandably depend on loop technology, but Csihar's voice might have been even more commanding without such a constant security blanket. At times, it feels like the sonic equivalent of the dry ice that surrounds headliners **Aethenor**, helmed by Stephen O'Malley and Guapo's Daniel O'Sullivan. Theirs is impressionistic, becalmed music that owes little to its heavy antecedents. O'Malley's minor-key riffs are softened by O'Sullivan's dreamlike keyboards, and the elegant, tensile drumming of veteran UK free-jazz percussionist, Steve Noble.

The end of Csihar's set sends me scurrying to the Raster-Noton room, where fans of label founder Carsten Nicolai are crammed to hear what appears to be a live mix of his latest **Alva Noto** album *Unitxt*. Created out of data from non-musical applications, it takes on an unexpectedly anarchic playfulness when booming over Maria's quality system.

But hopes of burrowing into the core of the sound are scotched by the crowd and the pull of the doom room, and I hover at the edge, the glee that tonight has been programmed with my brain chemistry in mind mixed with discomfort as two of my different listening personae confront one another, in real time, in a jam-packed doorway.

It is down to **Asva**, the constantly questing group put together by O'Malley's old Burning Witch pals G Stuart Dahlquist and B.R.A.D to pull the strands together with momentum, volume and beauty. Tonight playing as a new lineup, and premiering a new set, Dahlquist's band seems tentative, revolving around his gestural, deceptively simple basslines with democracy and close listening. Their more fluid methodology suits the material well, in particular the surprisingly jazz-tinged drumming of Greg Gilmore – a brave move, following B.R.A.D's austere style. The frequent presence of keyboard is a logical progression from the organ-led pieces that figured so heavily on *What You Don't Know Is Frontier*, but there's much here that is fresh, not least when Dahlquist and guitarists Rick Troy and David Webb launch into a shared vocal around 45 minutes in. Neither of the three have remarkable voices, and Asva's previous use of technically astounding singers like Jessika Kenny shines a harsh light on the performance – but the directness provides a welcome emotional jolt. If the word 'generosity' seems a sentimental one to describe the transaction between musician and audience, it is still the word that Asva's music prompts in me tonight, as the brain that's been buzzing overtime of late stills and is thankful before the twin offering of low-end power and graceful musicianship. A 4am walk home, ears numb from volume and cold, reveals the busy city of Berlin to be at peace for once; its clicks, cuts and glitches cocooned for a while in snow-clouds of bass.

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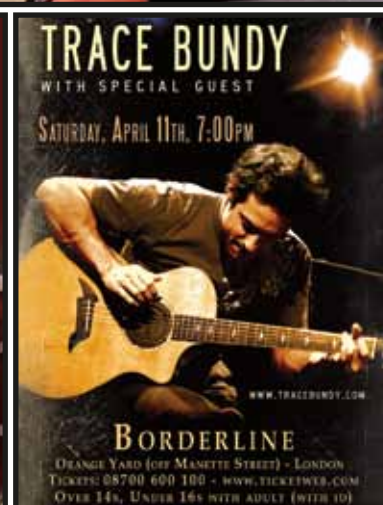
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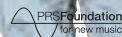
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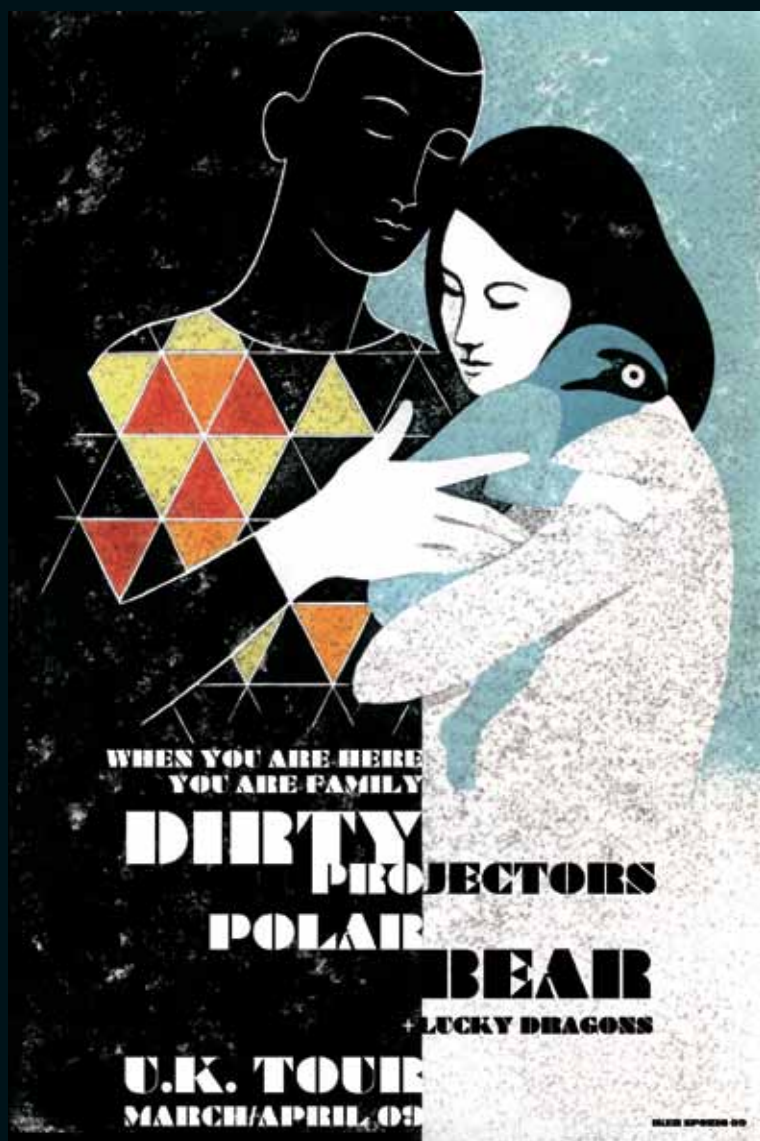


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POLAR BEAR

Polar Bear have earned a reputation as one of the most creative acts on the UK music scene. Their raw-boned, dramatic music mixes jazz with an electronic soundscape and a punk sensibility, underpinned by break-beat and rock rhythms. Combined with their compelling contrapuntal melodies and driving energy it's a sound that has already won them critical acclaim and a devoted audience.

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When I reviewed Keep Your Silver Shined back in June, I didn't really expect it to become my constant companion, but it has. Compared to more cerebral singer-songwriter faves of mine like Laura Veirs and Maria Taylor, Sproule is more conventionally rooted in jazz, country and blues. But, dammit, she has the best tunes and the most engaging voice. I caught her live show at St. Bonaventures in Bristol and it remains etched in my memory as one of the most enjoyable live gigs I've seen. Watch this girl soar. - THE GUARDIAN

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live preview

now booking: instal 2009

Interview: Lauren Strain

Who are you most looking forward to seeing perform this year?

"Seymour Wright investigates the possibilities of the saxophone by taking it apart, vibrating it with radios, or stuffing beer cans down the bell. Taku Unami is an ultra-minimalist acoustic laptop artist who uses custom-built software to set off motors and beaters on top of a resonant wooden board. Nikos Veliotis records every note that it's possible to play on the cello as a one-hour drone and then plays back all of them at the same time while the cello that was played for the recording process – which took two months – is turned to powder and bottled. Lastly, Ultra-red make field recordings of specially selected locations in Glasgow. These will be used as the starting point for a day-long performance/discussion between activists and organisers, artists and communities to identify a possible action to effect actual change in people's situations in Glasgow."

What do you feel each of these artists, while working across different mediums, have in common with each other?

"I'd say that we've tried to put together a festival that is broad, so that lots of people can find different ways in. But it does also have themes running through it. So much of contemporary music is about intense emotional severity, noise and high-energy; there are some great festivals and venues putting on this kind of stuff. We thought it might be interesting to look at the other end of the spectrum: things that are considered, sparse, quiet and silent, which can be equally as challenging. We're also really into text sound/ concrete poetry/vocal improvisation, so that's another theme."

Phil Minton's feral choir (above) sounds like a highlight. Can you tell us about this project?

"Phil is one of the great abstract vocalists of the last 30 years. We have some amazing vocal performances each day at the festival, from the landmark concrete poetry of Steve McCaffery to the great Joan La Barbara. Phil's project works with people who've never sung before, or who have certainly not improvised vocally before, and gives them the confidence and tools to

perform live. It's one of the most democratic musical projects I can think of."

Hermann Nitsch's work is extremely powerful and disturbing, and I'm particularly interested to know what drew you to him.

"It's not just that Hermann Nitsch's work as a whole might be disturbing; I think you have to think about his interest in ritual, in something like the ethics of religion and sacrifice. It's existential, and maybe to do with our culture's fixation on violence; in books, films, video games. His performances and actions regularly involve slaughtered and crucified animal carcasses, blood and fruit and people bound, gagged and directly involved in all the blood and guts. But there's an ecstasy in it all too; is that uneasy or unapologetic, or both/neither?"

And it's all centred around his music: blocks of maximal sound, inspired by great composers of the past but passed through a filter of lust, rot and death, poison and madness, fragrance and temperature, fluid and excess. At Instal he'll be performing a new musical piece for organ. You don't need to know how he's one of the great performance and visual artists of the 20th Century to get what he does musically."

Have any of the artists' exhibitions/performances been specifically commissioned for Instal?

"There'll be performances, talks, readings, workshops and community activism with Ultra-red: all kinds of stuff, but no exhibitions this year. Having said that, there are quite a few collaborations or performances that we've worked up with musicians: from Rolf Julius' performed installation (tiny vibrating speakers buried in earth, pigment, ash) to new collaborations between like-minded musicians, such as the ultra-minimalist performance by Radu Malfatti, Taku Unami, Sean Meehan and Klaus Filip that we'll be presenting on the Sunday."

(Barry Esson, festival organiser)

Instal melds minds, bends ears and opens eyes with a carefully-assembled array of musicians and innovators operating on the frontier of the avant-garde. See www.arika.org.uk for more information. Glasgow The Arches (March 20-22)

extra life

Plan B are pleased to support Zorn/ Branca collaborator and sometime Dirty Projector Charlie Looker as he brings his New York ensemble to these shores for the first time – a jaunt that coincides with the rerelease of their fine debut album, *Secular Works*, on Lo Recordings. "Something akin to *Rise Above* as performed by a minstrel jiggling for the delight of a portly king consuming a plate of chicken drumsticks – plus added HEAVY" we wrote, last month. More dates announced imminently. London Scala (w/Deerhunter, May 18)

africa oyé festival

"Free...freeeee...!" No, the needle isn't stuck on Livin' Joy; this, possibly the largest festival of African music in the UK, is just utterly *gratuit*. Aside from the musical entertainments, there'll be book and craft stalls, fashion and textile exhibitions, face-painting, puppet-making and beadwork workshops.

Liverpool Sefton Park (June 20, 21)

all tomorrow's parties vs the fans part II: the fans strike back

So here's how it happens: you buy your tickets, and *then* you get a chance to vote for who should play. See what they did there? Chosen by the festival organisers (and for you to go head to head with) so far: Spiritualized, Grails, Sleep, Young Marble Giants – performing *Colossal Youth* in full – Shearwater, The Cave Singers and plantpot dudes Devo. You? You're wanting Beirut, and Flight Of The Conchords. I'm with you on the latter.

Minehead Butlins Holiday Camp (May 8-10)

all tomorrow's parties

The second instalment for May, curated by The Breeders and so seeing blood old (the reformation of Throwing Muses, Shellac, Gang Of Four) and new (Holy Fuck, Deerhunter, Foals).

Minehead Butlins Holiday Camp (May 15-17)

au

Trippy psychedelia from the expanding American hermits.

Cardiff Buffalo Bar (April 28), Barrow-in-Furness The Canteen (May 2), Glasgow Captain's Rest (3), Edinburgh Bowery (4), York City Screen Basement (5), London Lexington (6)

bat for lashes

Natasha Khan brings her princess' glitter and madrigal's sorcery back out from the shadows; will months of writing and hibernation have seen an end to her wilful mysticism and obsession with horses? Or will she be much the same? See for yourself...

Manchester Ritz (April 7), Northumbria University (9), Leeds Metropolitan University (11), Birmingham Town Hall (12), Oxford Regal (13), Bristol University (15), Brighton Corn Exchange (16), London Empire (17)

the wave pictures

Dave Tattersall's clatter-bang trio herald the arrival of their new album, *If You Leave It Alone*, the follow-up to last year's sleeper hit *Instant Coffee Baby*, with a gallop 'round the country in a clapped-out van, smiles aloft and guitars a-quiver. Their acerbic, observational songwriting is in a class of its own; Tattersall has a way of making songs about chutney and chocolate reduce the most aloof of indie kids to a lumpy mush of tears. Tour support comes from Planet Earth, a winsome twosome inspired by the small things in life.

Reading TBC (April 3), York City Screen Basement (6), Cambridge The Soul Tree (7), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (9), Manchester Roadhouse (10), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (11), Cardiff Buffalo Bar (12), Bristol Thekla (13), Brighton Freebutt (14), London ICA (15)

andrew bird

Whimsical multi-instrumentalist brings bewildering paeans from latest album *Noble Beast* to the stage.

Bristol Thekla (May 10), London Shepherd's Bush Empire (11), Manchester Academy 2 (13), Glasgow Oran Mor (14)

bob log illrd

Strange man performs oddities from latest (charmingly titled) album *My Shit Is Perfect*. Bristol The Lanes (April 1), Canterbury The Farm House (2), Birmingham Cold Ride (3), Liverpool Class A Audio (4), Newcastle The Cluny (5), Sheffield The Shakespeare (6), Brighton Engine Room (7), London 100 Club (8)

bonnie 'prince' billy

Gather 'round for storytelling and oak-smoked wisdom courtesy of one Will Oldham.

London Royal Festival Hall (April 20)

british wildlife festival III

This festival features not a parliament of owls, a smack of jellyfish nor a mob of kangaroos, but an array of homo sapiens; specifically, weird noise maestros sitting neatly in that most compelling of genres, the unclassifiable. Organised by Leeds promoters Cops And Robbers, the line-up boasts Thomas Truax, Plaaydoh, Alexander Tucker, Cowtown, Dethscalator, Hey Panda and Teeth!!! There'll also be a gallery of local gig poster art to peruse, arts and crafts to buy and photography to muse 'pon. Best of all, it's a steal at just over a tenner for two days.

Leeds Brudenell Social Club and Royal Park Cellars (March 28, 29)

the broken family band

Happy-clappy country rock. Glasgow ABC2 (March 6), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (April 23), Edinburgh Cabaret Voltaire (24), Newcastle The Cluny (25), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (26), London Scala (May 7), Manchester Ruby Lounge (8), Bristol Thekla (9), Brighton Hanbury Ballroom (10), Cambridge The Junction (16)

ether 2009

String of specially commissioned events featuring the return of mouthy Ms Peaches, Royksopp, Vitalic, Fennesz, Rosy Parlano, CM Von Hauswolff, Squarepusher and BLK JKS – oh, and Brian Eno and John Hassell's *Conversation Piece*, film screenings at the British Film Institute, free and impromptu gigs and, uh, beatboxing talks. Would that be *how* to beatbox, or talks given entirely via impressions of drumkits? Either way, it sounds like something you want to be involved with.

London Southbank Centre (April 9-24)

the camden crawl

Expect endemic queues and take your oldest, skankiest pair of shoes – Camden High Street is sure to become one monstrous stream of vomit. Again.

London various venues (April 24, 25)

camp bestival

PJ Harvey is headlining! PJ Harvey is headlining! And apparently she's not gonna be playing anywhere else, y'hear? Y'hear? Other musical entertainments include that fragile lad Bon Iver and daydreamers Mercury Rev, but personally I'm most excited about Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall giving a *River Cottage* workshop, where you'll be able to learn how to gut a fish and stuff it with plums and 795 uses for the humble beetroot. That's *truly* where it's at.

Dorset Lulworth Castle (July 23-26)

crystal antlers

Crystals, the vogue jewel of the moment, have been harnessed by these Californian antlers and they're a-gallopin' towards you NOW.

London White Heat (March 10), Sheffield The Harley (11), Manchester Retro Bar (12)

daedelus

Nicking (and misspelling) his name from Greek mythology, Daedelus is a proponent of off-kilter compositions. Few people merge classical meanderings with sexy, seductive dub-conscious beats like this man.

Guildford Boileroom (March 16), London Hoxton Bar And Kitchen (17), London Scala (18), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (20), Nottingham Stealth (21), Brighton Freebutt (22)

das wanderlust

Splinter-sharp at times, cutesy at others, Das Wanderlust are the band that opted for twee – only to take it home, hack it to pieces and mix it into a lumpy pie.

Preston Mad Ferret (April 17), Manchester Fuel (18), Middlesbrough TBC (May 13)

deerhunter

This spring's ATP's are looking more and more like 4AD love-ins with each day's passing. An alluring prospect, yes: Georgian five-piece Deerhunter, who've kept a *relatively* hemmed-in profile since their formation back in 2001, are finally making it big. Expect lots of hazy, thrashy, passionate indie-rock (with a heart).

Minehead Butlins Holiday Camp (May 16), London Scala (18), Manchester The Deaf Institute (19), Glasgow Stereo (20), Belfast Black Box (21), Dublin Whelan's (22), Liverpool City Sound Festival (23), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (24), Brighton Audio (25)

angela desveaux

Thrill Jockey darling enchants.

Hull Adelphi (April 26), Cambridge The Portland Arms (28)

dot to dot festival

Now streamlined to spend just one day in each city, Dot To Dot has championed the likes of Santogold and Klaxons in previous years. Early bird tickets are long gone, so nab yours now (or consider yourself firmly out of the know).

Bristol various venues (May 23), Nottingham various venues (24)

matt eliott

Songs of redemption, songs of rebellion from man with bewitching guitar. Highly recommended.

London Barden's Boudoir (April 2)

exit festival

You might have to go all the way to Serbia, but you get to shake your booty inside a FORTRESS. It's an atmospheric place; one minute you're stumbling down narrow cobbled corridors, the next you're flying high in the dance arena as the sun rises over the ramparts. This is the festival's tenth anniversary; while line-up details are yet to be released we're sure it'll be celebratory.

Serbia Novi Sad (July 9-12)

experimental dental school

Oh, the images that conjures. You wouldn't volunteer to be a patient, would you? Even if it was in the name of furthering man's knowledge of surgery, or whatever.

Cardiff Buffalo Bar (May 5), London The Dome (9), Oxford Jericho Tavern (10), Glasgow TBC (11), Manchester TBC (12)

field day

Mogwai headline the third instalment of the now-notorious festival, along with appearances from Four Tet, Fennesz, Malcolm Middleton and, whoops! Errors.

London Victoria Park (August 1)

franz ferdinand

Scots indie-poppers remain haughty and aloof, snickering through skittish anthems.

Birmingham Academy (March 8), London Hammersmith Apollo (9)

futuresonic festival

Unifying music, digital culture and modern thought through performances, exhibitions and seminars, Futuresonic is now something of a Mancunian institution. 2009's bill is yet to be announced but should be another utterly enlightening affair, comrade. You can purchase individual tickets for separate gigs, but we highly recommend procuring a pass that allows entry to most, instead; plus, there are always a few free ones scattered about the city (gigs, that is, not passes).

Manchester various venues (May 13-16)

now booking: fuse 2009

Efterklang interview:
Lauren Strain

One of the main themes of Leeds' upcoming Fuse festival seems to be getting musicians to work outside of their comfort zones. You recently performed your album *Parades* with the The Danish National Chamber Orchestra; was the experience of re-writing and adapting the already existing music a difficult one?

"It was a very challenging and quite overwhelming project.

We learned many things along the way and are very happy that we now have another chance to perform this new score for *Parades*. We worked with Karsten Fundal, a Danish composer. No one in Efterklang has received a proper education in music, so working with him and his 50-piece orchestra was like a form of education."

"The new score is not radically different from that on the album. But the main difference is the fact that every single thing is played live in one go, while we originally spent 18 months in a studio making *Parades* layer on layer. To play this out live is a very, very strong feeling. While we were making the album we were thinking of how great something like this could be, but we considered it an impossible dream."

Did you feel that this performance was in some way a culmination of your years together as a band?

"We definitely feel that. It marks the perfect closure of *Parades* and all of the touring and activities that followed it. There are many other highlights in our career that we all remember, but this project is by far the biggest. Back in 2005 we played concerts outside Denmark for the first time and this last year we have toured in the USA and China. It is always special when you enter new territories; it makes you feel that you are moving forward. We are living an enriching life."

Your Rumraket label is home to some very respectable names including Grizzly Bear and amiina. What drew you to each of these bands/artists?

"We like music that somehow explores new fields or sounds. We think that all the artists on our label are very different compared to each other and that makes us proud. Efterklang has always been about combining elements from many different directions."

When you're composing, do you tend to see your music visually? Will you have certain



images in your head that you want to evoke? Or does the music come first...?

"We see music very visually. Often we will use images when we are explaining the idea for a song to each other or when debating how to develop a certain part of a song. It is a nice way of communicating about music. But recently we have been focussing more on grooves and hooklines!"

Where do you feel most at home on tour?

"For us, it always about the people. We like places with lots of friendly people and we are happy that we're lucky enough to often see ourselves in those places! From all our travels we have learned that even in the most depressed countries or political shitholes you can find very friendly people who care about each other and music. It seems that the further we get from Denmark the more mysterious we are. This suits us well. It is nice to be mysterious while sunbathing and drinking Coronas."

Do you have any special plans for your performance at Fuse? What can we expect?

"We really hope it will be magical. If everything falls into place between the festival audience and the Britten Sinfonia and Efterklang, then we know it will be great. The concept of the concert is that the two orchestras will merge into one."

(Mads Brauer and Rasmus Stolberg)

Leeds' Fuse festival explores new musical horizons through specially commissioned works and unexpected collaborations. The festivities will begin with *Fusillage*, a series of church bell peals composed by Gavin Bryars and Colleen. Manchester's chamber ensemble Psappha will perform original works by Leafcutter John, Paul Farrington and Amenity Space while Efterklang perform their album *Parades* with the Britten Sinfonia. Keep a beady eye on www.fuseleeds.com for more.



now booking: frightened rabbit

Interview: **Reena Makwana**

Hello, what are you up to?

"I am fully ensconced in a very comfortable bed. The past few days have been fun, aside from the terrifyingly turbulent flight back from New York. I am glad I'm not dead."

You've recently played a sold out Bowery Ballroom to great acclaim; would you say you have been better received in the US than the UK? How does that contrast feel?

"I'd love for us to be popular in the UK, but aside from Scotland, there aren't that many people who care all that much over here. I'm happy that I get to see the US at least three times a year though. Everything's simpler for us over there, because our tours bring in reasonable amounts of cash. I live on bread and cheese when I'm touring the UK."

How have you felt when you've been there recently – is there a tangible sense of excitement, of expectation, in the US right now?

"We were in the USA for the Democratic race, the election night and the inauguration. Playing a show in DC the night before Obama was sworn in was quite unforgettable."

What are the biggest contrasts you notice between the UK and the US?

"There is an unflinching confidence that most Americans seem to have. They are a lot more comfortable in their own skin than we are, and self deprecation isn't too common there."

What do you feel is the most exciting thing about working in/exploring new music right now? Is there anyone you'd want to collaborate with?

"I actually had a dream that Tunde from TV On The Radio was driving us on our tour. Maybe he wouldn't be into that collaboration, though he was apparently getting paid \$10 per mile. Outrageous. Recently on tour we've

been listening to Takka Takka, Lykki Li, Nigerian highlife, Arc In Round, Right On Dynamite, The Twilight Sad and We Were Promised Jetpacks."

Do you think it will continue to be possible for people to eke a living from the music business?

"We've never really made a living from this. I don't have an apartment to live in and I really don't buy anything other than food and guitar strings, so it's a simple enough life. I will always make music, and I want to keep releasing it too, but there may come a time when people stop caring."

What've been your absolute high points – or low points?

"I feel like packing it in at least three times a week, but it's an empty threat. The high points seem to keep coming. Our last night in Chicago was ridiculous. Two shows in the same venue in one night. Both of them were memorable in different ways. The excitement in the room was unbelievable. It totally caught me by surprise."

Where've you been that's had the best attitude to life? And the worst?

"Scotland. The mixture of joy and misery is quite unique. Scots manage to form one out of the other. I guess that means we have the happiest, yet shittiest places available on earth, and both of those are excellent in equal measure."

What's inspiring you now?

"I suppose I've felt quite lonely on a lot of the tours. That's been quite informative. But I'm generally much happier now than I used to be. I'm going to tackle the brighter side of life next." **(Scott Hutchison)**

Frightened Rabbit do their wide-eyed tremble at the following locations on the following days.
Newcastle The Castle Keep (March 26), Barrow-In-Furness Canteen (27), Leicester The Musician (29), Birmingham Glee Club (30), Glasgow Captain's Rest (31), Dublin Academy 2 (April 1), London Scala (15)

antony and the johnsons

This is Antony Hegarty's first full tour of the UK since 2005 (minus his pre-Christmas shows with the LSO at the Barbican last year), and it promises to yield dark powers: new album, *The Crying Light*, is a jet and opal opus; "The embodiment of nature is perpetual," wrote Petra Davis in *Plan B #40*. "The barrier between the self and the world is dismantled. Limbs become water, leaves become eyes, sunlight becomes crystalline".

Brighton Dome (May 21), Birmingham Symphony Hall (22), Bristol Colston Hall (23), London Hammersmith Apollo (27), Gateshead The Sage (29), Belfast Waterfront (June 1), Edinburgh Playhouse (4)

the great escape festival

Like the Camden Crawl's prettier, sexier little sister, where you're by the sea, it's warm and there are (thankfully) fewer people. We're such antisocial beggars. Make a beeline for the *Plan B* stage where you can catch Marnie Stern, Micachu, Vivian Girls and The Pains Of Being Pure At Heart all on one stage in quick succession; elsewhere, Esser, Ben Kweller, Future Of The Left, and Passion Pit make it a weekend to remember.

Brighton venues (May 14-16)

the green man festival

No one has been confirmed as part of the leafy haven's line-up just yet, but the early bird tickets have all sold out so you'd better be at yer buzzers for the next round.

Wales Glanusk Park (August 21-23)

hauschka

Expansive lateral thinker Hauschka is an enigmatic experimentalist who tinkers with the piano to glorious effect (see his latest record *Snowflakes And Carwrecks* for proof). For prepared strings and clattering keys, look no further.

Bexhill De La Warr Pavilion (March 12), Reading South Street Arts Centre (13), London Queen Elizabeth Hall (20), London Union Chapel (27)

HEALTH

Maximal slams of death disco.

Brighton Prince Albert (April 13), London Tufnell Park Dome (15), Dublin Whelan's (17), Belfast The Menagerie (18), Glasgow Stereo (19), Manchester The Deaf Institute (22)

midori hirano

Kyoto-born artiste celebrates the virtues of the computer.

London Barden's Boudoir (March 25)

the island 50 festival

Yep, it's 50 years since Island Records' conception. So they're having a party. Aw. Home to PJ Harvey, Portishead and, um, a few others, they're teaming up with label founder Chris Blackwell to sprout archival films, documentaries, photography, artwork and the obligatory live music.

London Shepherd's Bush Empire (May 4-10)

bloc 2009

So surely there's no time for anyone to actually go and have a family holiday at Butlins anymore. Festivals have taken up residency; and this one's aimed precisely at the insomniacs among you, with a line-up featuring Skream, Benga, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Ulrich Snauss, Metro Area, Carl Craig, Future Sound Of London, our favourite cat Jamie Lidell, creature of the night Arabian Prince and, oh, so much more.

Minehead Butlins Holiday Camp (March 13-15)

it hugs back

Drenched in dreamy layers of lacquered production, these guys – who, I'd imagine, shun houses for padding aimlessly through meadows – have charmed 4AD into giving them a home. Let them worked their skewed indie magic upon you.

Leeds Brudenell Social Club (March 1), London Lexington (12), Bristol Cooler (21)

jean michel jarre

Excuse my slip into internet-speak, would you? But, as they say in cyberspace: "OMG!" **London Wembley Arena (May 22), Manchester Evening News Arena (23), Birmingham NIA (24)**

le weekend

Stirling's very best festival disagrees with boundaries and limits; this year, the line-up is all about freedom and exploration, with appearances from Carla Bozulich and Evangelista, Broadcast, Trembling Bells, Keith Rowe and spadefuls more.

Stirling Tolbooth (May 29-31)

the lexie mountain boys

Enchanting chanteuses from Baltimore make feral noise and yip-jump vocals together, exploring the capacities of the human voice box in thrilling, naughty fashion.

Brighton Greenhouse Effect (April 29), Nottingham Chameleon (May 1)

micachu and the shapes

Beautiful bungled miscellany from London's new favourite sprog. She's just been signed to Rough Trade, y'know.

Glasgow Captain's Rest (March 25), Edinburgh Sneaky Pete's (26), Bristol Croft (28), Sheffield Harley (29), Nottingham Bodega (30), Manchester The Deaf Institute (31), Liverpool Korova (April 1), Brighton Freebutt (3), Southampton Lennons (4), Reading Oakford Social Club (7), Cardiff Buffalo Bar (8), London Fabric (9), Dorset Lulworth Castle (July 26)

morrissey

Hey, old timer; welcome home, and all that. Whose is that baby, huh?

Liverpool Empire (May 10), London Royal Albert Hall (11), Birmingham Symphony Hall (13), Great Yarmouth Britannia Pier (15), Cambridge Corn Exchange (16), Hull Arena (19), Hartlepool Borough Hall (20), Manchester Apollo (22, 23), Salisbury City Hall (25), London Mile End Troxy Ballroom (26), London Brixton Academy (28, 30)

african rebels tour: extra golden, baaba maal and oliver mtukudzi

Extra Golden's new record *Thank You Very Quickly* is a vibrant, colourful celebration of overcoming adversity; witness them join euphoric forces with Senegalese vocalist/guitarist Baaba Maal and Zimbabwean artist Oliver Mtukudzi's frenetic, optimistic pop. Let them instil you with a renewed sense of hope, of coming together and counting blessings.

Gateshead The Sage (March 3), Liverpool Philharmonic (4), Manchester Bridgewater Hall (6), Poole Lighthouse (7), Brighton Dome (8), London Roundhouse (9), Northampton Royal and Derngate (11), Basingstoke The Anvil (12), Leicester De Montfort Hall (13), Warwick Arts Centre (14)

nadja

Toronto's Aidan Baker and Leah Buckareff bring doom, but no dearth of beauty.

Cardiff Buffalo (March 20), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (21), London Barden's Boudoir (22)

noah and the whale

Ahh, they're the nation's new favourite set of dandies, apparently; all bedecked in blue and yellow waistcoats with monacles (singing sprightly, chart-bothering folk-pop). Practice your moves to 'Five Years' Time'.

Norwich UEA (March 5), London Shepherd's Bush Empire (6), Brighton St George's Church (7), Manchester Academy 2 (8), Gateshead The Sage (10), Edinburgh Queens Hall (11), Leeds Metropolitan University (12), Birmingham Town Hall (13), Bristol Academy (15), Nottingham Trent University (16)

palimpsest festival

A truly spiritual gathering within four holy walls that sees Chris Corsano's Vibracathedral Orchestra create unnerving 'scapes alongside Herb Diamante, John Clyde-Evans, Group Doueh and one of our 'Next Wave 2009' groups of choice, Part Wild Horses Mane On Both Sides. There'll be whacked-out DJing from the likes of Sublime Frequencies, and, naturally, all manner of ways to fill your brains with illicit ideas. Tickets will be available from April 3, from www.palimpsest-festival.co.uk

Cambridge All Saints Church (May 30)

peter, bjorn and john

The trio behind *that* hit with Victoria Bergsman (don't whistle it, please don't whistle it).

London Scala (March 5), Manchester Academy (6), Dublin The Button Factory (7)

planet earth

Two boys named Sam and Nick met; lo and behold, a collection of lilting, literary and avuncular ditties were created. Debut single 'Bergman Movies' is out via Young And Lost Club soon.

London Old Queen's Head (March 15), London 93 Feet East (17), Reading tbc (April 3), York City Screen Basement (6), Cambridge The Soul Tree (7), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (9), Manchester Roadhouse (10), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (11), Cardiff Buffalo Bar (12), Bristol Thekla (13), Brighton The Freebutt (14), London ICA (15)

ponytail

There's always much fun to be had aboard Ponytail's clatter-wagon; jump on and cling for yer life all the way back to Baltimore.

Brighton Audio (March 7), Bristol Start The Bus (8), Cardiff Tommy's Bar (9), Dublin Whelan's (11)

shearwater

Jonathan Meiburg's elegiac group make your heart swoon and the tears swarm with renditions from latest album, *Rook*.

London The Forum (May 8), London Union Chapel (12)

shooting spires

Brooklyn posse tackle "the sweet embrace of agoraphobia and insomnia", so they say; calm yourselves for a night of musical healing.

London Madame Jo Jo's (March 3), Manchester Retro Bar (4), Dublin Thomas Reads (5), Cork The Quad (6)

short circuit festival

A delectable selection of electronica and avant-garde composition is ready to caress yer lobes; main events include Holger Czukay playing previously unheard Can material, Barcelona's Sonar festival curating an afternoon, Philip Jeck and The Gavin Bryars Ensemble colliding head-on and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop getting together to explore the past and future thru live performance and multimedia projections.

London Roundhouse (May 14-17)

shred yr face tour part ii

The Bronx, Fucked Up and Rolo Tomassi are the ones doing the business on yer face this time, so it'll be a bit more hardcore than last year's relatively fey outing of No Age, Los Campesinos! and Times New Viking.

Cardiff Clwb Ifor Bach (March 2), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (3), London Electric Ballroom (4), Brighton Concorde 2 (5), Birmingham Academy (6)

sons of noel and adrian

Earthy group folk.

London The Wilmington Arms (April 23), Manchester TBC (24), Glasgow The Classic Grand (25), Newcastle The End (26), Cardiff Buffalo Bar (27), Bristol The Mother's Ruin (28), Falmouth Miss Peapod's (29), Winchester The Railway (30), Canterbury Orange Street Music Club (May 1), Brighton Pavilion Theatre (2)

sublime frequencies

All herald the first ever Sublime Frequencies tour, featuring two of the label/collective's fixtures, Group Doueh — all the way from the Western Sahara — and Omar Souleyman of Syria plus, on most dates, Sublime Frequencies DJs, film screenings and talks. Dates are yet to be confirmed, but keep a blinky eye on www.sublimefrequencies.com

Venues and dates tbc (May 20-30)

supersuckers

The self proclaimed "greatest rock and roll band in the world" drop by for a fairly extensive jaunt.

London ULU (April 11), Brighton Concorde 2 (12), Southampton Brook (13), Bristol Thekla (14), Swansea TBC (15), Birmingham Barfly (16), Manchester Club Academy (17), Newcastle Academy 2 (18), Glasgow ABC (19), Belfast Limelight (20), Wrexham Central Station (23), York Duchess (24), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (25)

vessels

Leeds' proggy gems get vetted by *Rock Sound*, score tour!

Preston Mad Ferret (April 2), Cambridge The Portland Arms (3), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (4), Glasgow Captain's Rest (7), Newcastle The End (8), Edinburgh Sneaky Pete's (9), Reading Oakford Social Club (12), London Buffalo Bar (22), Cardiff Buffalo Bar (23), Barrow-in-Furness The Canteen (24), Manchester The Royal Oak (25), Brighton Prince Albert (27), Leeds Fuse Festival (29)

the virgins

Wouldn't you like to get your mitts on some of the creative juices released into the waters around New York recently? Yet another band to emerge from that same gene pool, these guys probably aren't as innocent and nubile as their moniker might suggest...

London Koko (March 27), Brighton Digital (April 14), Bristol Thekla (15), Manchester Ruby Lounge (16), Edinburgh Cabaret Voltaire (17), Glasgow King Tuts (18), Newcastle The Cluny (20), Birmingham Rainbow (21), Leeds Cockpit (22), London Heaven (23), Belfast Speakeasy (26)

dirty projectors/polar bear/lucky dragons

An Arts Council-sponsored tour, in which nu-jazz impresarios Polar Bear make friends with *Plan B* favourites Dirty Projectors (whose new record is in the pipeline as I type) and ritualistic mystics Lucky Dragons. We predict a kaleidoscope of new ground to unfurl beneath your toes like new buds in springtime; this is the perfect way to brighten up the year.

Nottingham Rescue Rooms (March 24), Cardiff Clwb Ifor Bach (25), Belfast Black Box (27), Dublin Crawdaddy (28), Glasgow ABC2 (29), Brighton Komedija (31), Manchester Mint Lounge (April 1), London Scala (2), Bristol Arnolfini (3), Coventry Taylor John's House (4)

volcano!

Difficult but delicious Chicago trio perplex yer cerebral cortex at the following dates, places (with Wildbirds And Peacedrums in Manchester and London).

Brighton The Freebutt (April 5), Manchester Dulcimer (6), London Luminaire (7)

nancy wallace

Mistress of spooked folk takes up residency every Wednesday for four weeks, hosting different supports and friends each time.

London The Britannia Pub (May 6, 13, 20, 27)

wavves

Up'n'coming hot young thang who's just signed to Bella Union.

Manchester The Bay Horse (March 2), London Scala (3), Cardiff Buffalo Bar (4), Brighton The Prince Albert (5), London TBC (6)

caroline weeks

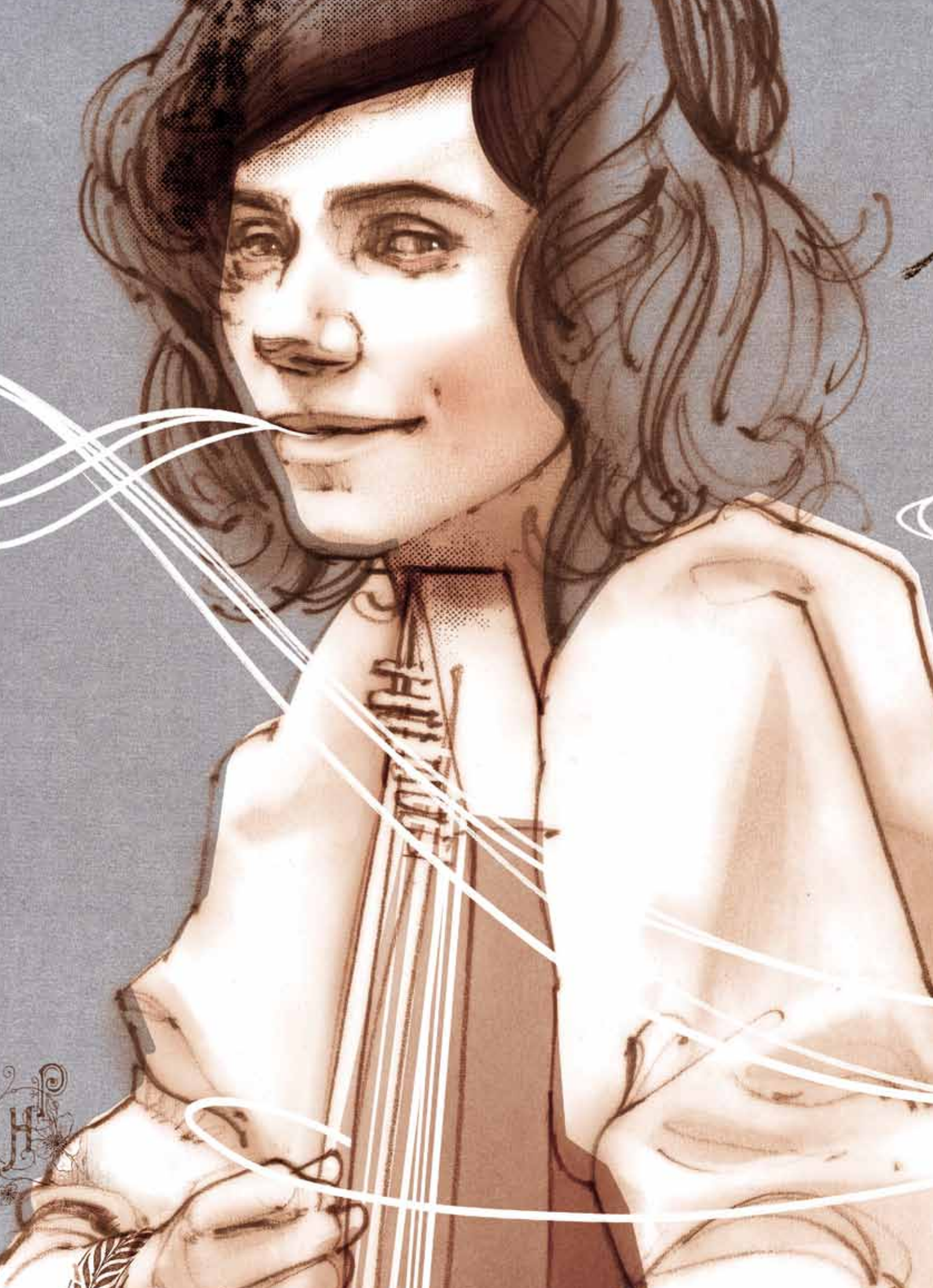
Bat For Lashes' bandmember and artiste in her own right takes to the road to preview upcoming album *Songs For Edna*.

Stoke Newington Word Festival (March 7), London Luminaire (26), Brighton Westhill Community Hall (April 11), Birmingham Town Hall (12), Oxford The Regal (13), Bristol Anson Rooms (15), Brighton Corn Exchange (16), London Cafe Oto (18)

wildbirds and peacedrums

Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin met at Gothenburg's Academy Of Music And Drama. The rest, as they say, is history; here they'll be previewing new material from upcoming album *The Snake*: expect feral noise, elemental melody and some loving glances cast 'cross the stage (they're married, y'know).

London The Social (March 2), Brighton Prince Albert (April 1), Norwich Arts Centre (2), Bristol Arnolfini (3), Sheffield Leadmill (4), Glasgow Captain's Rest (5), Manchester Dulcimer (6), London Luminaire (7)





Albums

this is desire

Words: **Nicola Meighan**

Illustration: **Kristin Oftedal**

PJ Harvey and John Parish **A Woman A Man Walked By (Island)**

"Who would suspect me of this rapture?" – 'Black Hearted Love'

Quite a few of us, as it happens, Polly Jean.

Of course, many of us would expect nothing less than swaggering nirvana and wry exaltation from England's exceptional blues-rock consort, because Harvey – long held as a bewitching yet earnest harbinger of cadaverous pop – is also, at times, you know: *a laugh*.

Sure, her muse is profoundly garrotted by malevolent folklore, murder balladry and a frankly macabre vernacular (indeed, said virtues spatter this excellent album). But from the swaggering kick-off, this second album billed with enduring collaborator/producer Parish serves to testify that, above all else, Harvey's here to entertain. 'Black Hearted Love' may signal a nod to the artist's gothic theatricality, but listen up: it's a full-on, rambunctious axe serenade, flushed with valiant carnal euphoria. It reminds us that the only reason Harvey is not a fuck-off superstar is because she chooses not to be. Like the delirious, corrosive pop of 'The Letter' (2004), 'Good Fortune' (2000), 'A Perfect Day Elise' (1998), 'C'mon Billy' (1995), 'Sheela-Na-Gig' (1992) and numerous other marvels before it, 'Black Hearted Love' lays bare Harvey's irrepressible knack for flagellating the flaccid rock canon.

Her histrionic romps don't stall at track one: they're all over this oft-comical shop of horrors, which is imbued with funereal hoopla, musical tomfoolery and lyrical monkey business. But they're rarely as immediate as 'Black Hearted Love', and with good reason. As with her contemporaries (and erstwhile collaborators) Thom Yorke and Nick Cave, Harvey avidly rails against lucrative blueprints and aesthetic complacency; she violates the outposts of (re)invention instead. "For me, the most important thing, with anything I'm working on, is that it doesn't remind me of something I've done before," Harvey recently stated. "I could really easily keep doing one same formula, and a lot of people would probably love it, but I'd start dying inside."

And so it figures that this treatise is at odds with the brilliant austerity of Harvey's last canvas, 2007's *White Chalk*, cited by many as her greatest work to date. Whereas the piano-navigated *White Chalk* was an exercise in stylistic allegiance, *A Woman A Man Walked By* is an album of dramatic contrasts and contradictions: the skewed, brawny guitars of the opening gambit brawl with a mangy ukulele croon in 'Sixteen, Fifteen, Fourteen', while fragmented, antique R&B ('April') seduces treacherous, bone-spitting blues (the title track) and distorted freak-outs ('Pig Will Not') nuzzle up with cinematic psalms ('Passionless, Pointless'). But the record's livid badinage does not compromise

its passages of reverie or sadness: Harvey and Parish's sophomore outing also exquisitely soundtracks loss, longing, emptiness, rage, loneliness and quiet abandonment. It's as contemplative as it is cacophonous; as beatific as it is brutal. It's like nothing Harvey's done before. You want proof? Here, by way of qualification (and if my memory serves correct), are some things that Harvey has never done before:

impersonated macy gray

I refer you to 'April' – a cracked soul dirge that sees our chanteuse expose her chimerical larynx while blithely maligning the calendar month that brings with it flowers and gambolling lambs: "*April, your rain overcomes me*," the narrator creaks, groaning beneath the burden of another year.

turned her talents to rapping

Enter PJ 'emcee' Harvey on the album's gentle, existential swansong 'Cracks In The Canvas'. "*Dear God, you better not let me down this time...*" she opines. It's nice and all that, a quiet poem for dearly departed, but she's geared us up for FUN by now.

She violates the outposts of reinvention

We want screeching, pantomimic wig-outs with schizophrenic transsexuals; sodomy, offal! And, as luck would have it...

recoiled in the joys of chicken liver balls

This is more like it. "*I want your fuckin' ASS*," paces Harvey, like a growling loon, on the record's hideous, glorious title track. It's a blues-defiling, brainsick ode to sexual malevolence, rejection and god knows what. It appears to conjure the seething mockery of a (possibly identifiable) balding coxcomb with a "*chicken liver spleen*" and "*damp alleyways of the soul*", although I dare not speculate further. What's certain is that it's a breathtaking wig-out – a raving maelstrom of death-knell pianos, pan-pipe whoops and ritualistic percussion. It is awful. It is awesome.

barked like a dog

The tumbling grunge Babel of 'Pig Will Not' has myriad highlights – gargantuan riffage, psychotic drum ruckus and a dissonant, hilarious snarl – but the climax erupts in a canine clamour. "*I am your guardian! I am your fairy! Woof Woof!*" she yowls.

Truly, she is untouchable.



blue blooded creature

Words: **Chris Houghton**

Illustration: **Anna Higgie**

Fever Ray

Fever Ray (Rabid/Cooperative)

It's apposite that the first time I hear this, London has entered its deepest chill in a generation: everything has ground to a halt and people are waiting for buses that will never come, or slipping on compacted ice outside the newsagents. Fever Ray – Karin Dreijer Andersson of Swedish brother-sister duo The Knife – has a lot to live up to. Over the past decade, their music – whether rendered through a prism of sunny-sad electro gloss or through carbon-coloured, concentric rings of techno-pop – had a singularly focused, unique and uncanny effect. In the distance, the puppet-masters pull off their beak masks in the snow, and, meanwhile, brother Olof Dreijer has reportedly been in the Amazon recording animals, fish and plants for the soundtrack to a Darwin-inspired opera. At times of sadness, I like to imagine the in-jokes at their family outings.

This is Karin's debut album. Appropriately, it sounds at once everything like The Knife, and nothing like them at all. Recorded in the period after their stunningly ambitious, stony-faced and silly 2006 live shows and the birth of her second child, *Fever Ray* sounds a little like Tujiko Noriko, a little like Bowery Electric and a little like surrender. Despite the name, gone are the feverish synths of 'Silent Shout' and 'Like A Pen': the production is subtle, 'atmospheric', comfortable, unchanging; sounds are held up to the

Until the ice thaws

half-light, examined, accepted, and stretched out like bubblegum until they fade away. The lyrics are abstract, little thought-haikus that don't bear too much inspection.

It's my favourite album of the year so far partly because it sounds like you don't deserve it to be so good. Clearly, it's not fun and games. Opener 'If I Had A Heart' smears vocals that are part-Gregorian chant, part animalistic growl upon leftover synths from a Knife remix that never happened. 'Triangle Walks' dips and spins on sour pop hooks as

Andersson enunciates words like they're weapons. 'Coconut' channels the pre-chorus to Beck's 'Loser' as played by a chorus of children whose only access to music was being force-fed Neu!'s 'Halogallo'. 'Now's The Only Time I Know' speaks in tongues about feeding sparrows and painting eyelashes.

Generally, there's such a blankness and bleakness that you just want to jump up into it and crawl inside: 'Seven' revels in downtempo synths and signifiers of boredom; "We used to talk on the phone... We talk about love/We talk about dishwasher tablets, illness/And we dream about heaven". I can imagine it being the soundtrack to a particularly brutal beating. You can't dance to it. Andersson once described The Knife's last album *Silent Shout* to *Plan B* as "very dark...dark blue. And black...with hints of bright stuff". Synaesthetes will equally love *Fever Ray* in a different way: there's a texture underpinning her songs that's at once purely sonic and also real: they tickle on the surface of your fingertips. *Fever Ray* doesn't really move you so much as *have* motion. But that's half of the attraction.

Take it daily, until the ice thaws.

1990s

Kicks (Rough Trade)

Formed by Jamie McMorrow and Jackie McKeown after the breakup of The Yummy Fur, Glasgow's 1990s certainly have the kind of Franz Ferdinand-influencing indie heritage many bands would sell their perfect haircuts for. It doesn't matter a jot on their disappointing second album, however, which raids the high camp of the glam Eighties for inspiration. The T-Rex stomp of 'I Don't Even Know What That Is' fits disturbingly snugly into today's 'music to soundtrack seven pints and a fistfight' mini-genre, and the incessantly whimsical lyrics ("Everybody just chillax/Let's buy a bear and move to

France") soon grate. *Kicks* feels like a flash smile with nothing behind it.

Chris Lo

Air France

No Way Down (Something In Construction)

Opening with a storm of circus horns, Gothenburg's Air France take you to dreamy places on blissed-out mind doodles. This compilation of two EPs occupies the same fey techno micro-genre as The Field's *From Here We Go Sublime*; it's carefully euphoric. 'No Excuses' throbs and rolls like a sunny motorbike ride, but it could lose the sickly, 'uplifting' disco strings. 'Karibien'

drowns amid bongo noise and desperate voices. Delicately assembled but frustratingly thin-sounding throughout, *No Way Down* is the ignorable soundtrack to a beach bonfire party.

Thom Gibbs

Lily Allen

It's Not Me, It's You (Regal)

If so inclined, you could waste a whole weekend trying to figure out why our Lil's second album is so much better than her first. Is it just the pressure of having to follow up platinum debut *Alright, Still*? There's certainly a beautiful economy here, sculpted, with every note resolved and true. Or has she

scaled up the acerbic wit and taboo?

Well, sorta, but not really, although 'Not Fair' takes bitchy demolition of the male ego to new heights, an anthem for every woman to sing pissed when her man hasn't made her come. Could it just be the continuity, the way it gels as the work of two people (Allen and producer Greg Kurstin)? Or how she's contextualised her retro postures as part of a stainless, gleaming postmodern *now* rather than just chucking a bunch of old stuff together as an exercise in fetishistic nostalgia? Maybe. Or maybe it's just the blessed absence of that useless tosser Mark Ronson. Yeah. That's it.

Ringo P Stacey

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roar roar rasputin

Words: **Joseph Stannard**

Illustration: **Nick White**

Mastodon

Crack The Sky (Warner Bros/Reprise)

It scarcely matters what the concept of Mastodon's fourth album is; it only matters that the concept exists. The concept album can be a formidable weapon aimed squarely at the heads of those who would restrict the creativity and ambition of musicians – especially musicians who don't want their albums to be a bunch of disconnected, download-friendly tracks but prefer to construct a song cycle about, say, the epic hunt for the white whale, ascending a mountain of blood or, in the case of *Crack The Sky*, astral travel, Tsarist Russia and the devil. The Atlanta quartet aren't alone in putting a post-millennial spin on the supposed follies of the progressive Seventies – lesser bands such as the awful Coheed And Cambria are also doing their bit for the perpetuation of pomp – but Mastodon are bigger, gnarlier and smarter than the competition, and they also have better riffs. But is that all there is? Is this just another breakneck hurtle through

musical territory covered on previous album, *Blood Mountain*?

Not really. *Crack The Sky* continues the process of refinement Mastodon have been engaged in since their early days, a gradual smoothing down of the edges to mirror the gradual maturation of their songcraft. While the band have become noticeably distanced from the rough'n'ready outfit of yore ('yore' being a peculiarly proggy word) and their songs increasingly melodic, their arrangements have assumed a complexity that encourages them to push the limits of their

Astral travel, Tsarist Russia and the devil

abilities. If all of this makes Mastodon sound like similarly prog-influenced Swedish metal megastars Opeth, fear not; at heart, Mastodon are a hardcore band. There are no vile Nightwish-style vocals to be found here; even the most lavishly turned curlicue is imbued with purpose. As with *Blood Mountain*, the rugged intricacy of *Crack The Sky* reflects the twists of a decidedly baroque plot rather than the onanistic tendencies of its creators.

Perhaps I should reveal something of the concept. It wouldn't be giving too much away to inform that our dear old friend – and muse to Boney M – Grigori Efimovich Rasputin puts in a crucial, spirited appearance, a device which recalls the vibrant phantasmagoria of Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* comic and Guillermo Del Toro's 2004 film adaptation and its 2008 sequel. Mastodon's rich, mythic-heroic aesthetic – expressed both through the gallop-over-treacherous-terrain of the music and Paul Romano's eye-bogglingly intricate cover art – is a dead ringer for Del Toro's, making a collaboration seem entirely appropriate, if unlikely and ultimately unnecessary. Mastodon convey enough excitement through sound alone. It helps that they appear to mean it. One of the most gratifying things about Mastodon is that they're not just a bunch of spoiled suburban dicks playing around with TSR imagery for a cheap laugh; they distil the human need for adventure and heroism into their music with a straight face and stout heart. This may account for the Apollonian feel of their music; it feels noble, righteous, perhaps even moral. In this respect, and many others, there's no band quite like Mastodon. Keep watching the sky.

Arbouretum

Song Of The Pearl (Thrill Jockey)

I'm of the opinion that the devil is in the detail. There's an impulse to see groups in a particular genre as existing on a linear scale with excellent at one end and bilge at the other, but it's truer to say that most 'genre music' signed to a label exists on a bell-curve, with everything very close together. So it is the smallest of details that count here, and this album is a slice of dazzling alternative rock. It's recorded easy on the gain but loud as fuck; lysergic bursts of warm guitar vibrate snare skins. Arbouretum owe as much to the English delivery of Martin Carthy as they do to the beatnik languor of Fred Neil and the

polychromatic textures of J Mascis. Stylistically, you may have heard stuff like this before – but it's the little details that put them way out in the lead.

John Doran

Belbury Poly

From An Ancient Star (Ghost Box)

The 11th release from Ghost Box sees the label continue to explore the uncanny sonic possibilities of a semi-mythical past. Belbury Poly – a reference to CS Lewis' novel *That Hideous Strength* – is an alter ego of Jim Jupp, one of the founders of the label who, along with Julian House, has become the unwitting standard bearer of a genre tentatively labelled 'hauntology'. From the

Erich Von Däniken and HP Lovecraft-referencing sleeve notes to the pastoral English folk which merges with an epic, 'foreign' exoticism, Jupp's latest piece of audio is a celebration of the eccentric. 'The All At Once Club' is a sort of slapstick funfair; 'A Great Day Out' is a jubilant, genre-ripping romp which takes a detour into melodica-infused dub. The combined effect is comfortable, comforting and strangely unsettling; everything you'd expect.

Stuart Aitken

Bob Log III

My Shit Is Perfect (Birdman)

While one-man-band Bob Log III's latest outing is stuffed full of biting

humour, it's difficult not to tire of it quickly. With a basic format of speedy, exaggerated blues-pluck, vocal grunts and country twangs, it pretty soon becomes one continuous thud. This isn't to say you can't put references to it: he squelches like Ween, rants like the Residents and could even challenge Primus in the white boy funk stakes (though in places this feels more like he's lifted those bass riffs from *Seinfeld*). Ultimately, he's a dude playing the guitar and a bass drum with his foot – and it's the kind of thing that needs to be witnessed in a live setting to take effect. This documentation doesn't work.

Jonathan Falcone

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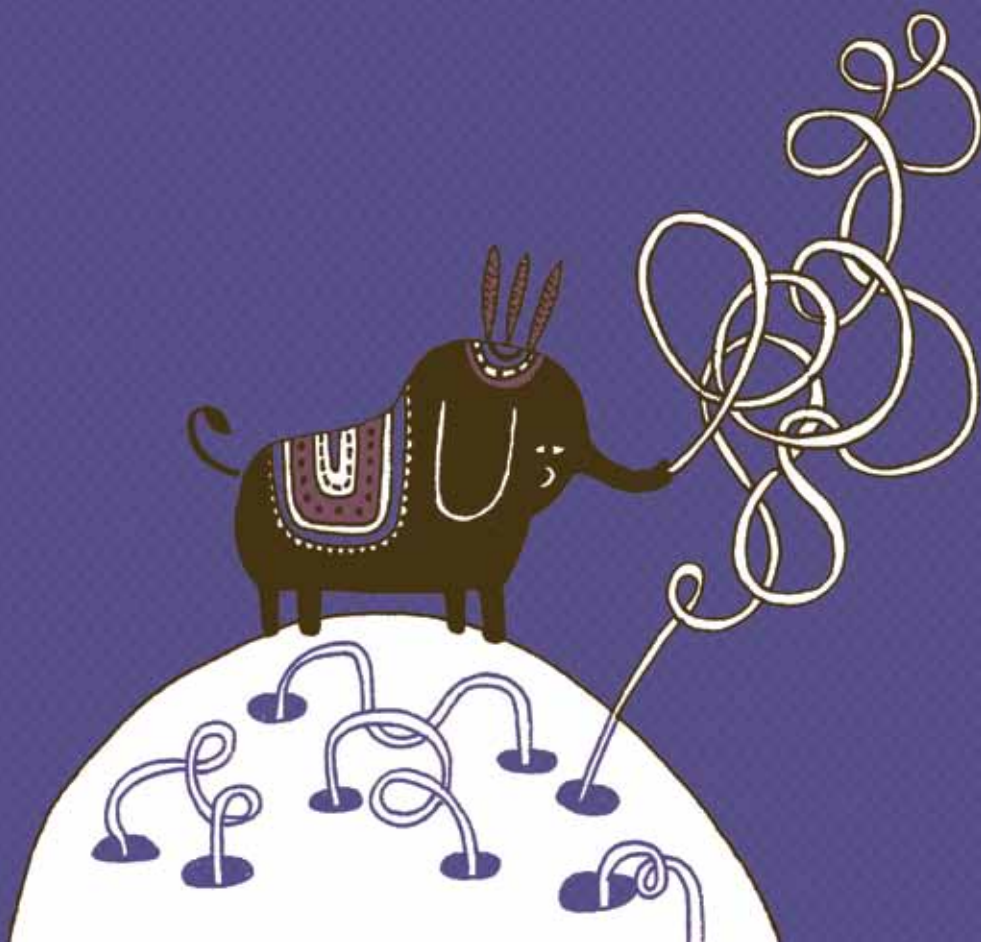
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when the bell tolls

Words: **John Doran**

Illustration: **Gemma Correll**

As various modes of haunted weather audition (convincingly) for the apocalypse, we think it wise to compile a soundtrack for approaching doom

Slomo: The Bog (Important)

LSD March: Under Milk Wood (Important)

Strings Of Consciousness And Angel: Strings Of Consciousness And Angel (Important)

Æthenor: Faking Gold And Murder (VHF)

Final: Reading All The Right Signs Wrong (No Quarter)

I'm listening to a big batch of drone during the UK's "biggest snow event for years". The weather incident is like a dry run for a cataclysmic disaster that ends all human life. In districts, everyone retreats to their house; in houses, everyone retreats to their rooms; in rooms, everyone retreats beneath their duvets. People who go to work are "the only ones who made it in".

During **Slomo's** *The Bog* my brother-in-law pulls a reverse Oates, coming in unexpectedly from the snow and sitting down next to me. "It sounds like the music you'd hear if you were on a boat and really fucked," he says. He doesn't mean handbag house on a ferry in Ibiza, and he's right. It's not like the actual music you'd hear the cruise ship's stoic band playing as the waves lapped against their shins, or like the OST to the film of the event, but an enhanced psycho-acoustic interpretation of a mass of ice the size of Edinburgh castle causing seasoned timbers to creak and break, an unmanned bell tolling in the wind. As the title suggests, **Slomo's** (slightly poorly recorded) album is actually about bog men, a subject which seems to have spread like memetic wildfire through the drone community. Julian Cope, who is better preserved than the Tollund Man and more mentally diverse than a Stone Age priest who dined on nothing but ergot, turns up to add verse to the deathly groans.

If **Slomo** sounds like a slow descent beneath the waves, then *Under Milk Wood* is the herky jerky

stomp of the dead sailors coming back out of the brine. **LSD March** are a Sapporo-based duo who deal in post-Mercury Rev's *Yerself Is Steam*, post-Sebadoh's *The Freed Man*, MV&EE-style lysergic guitar haze morphing into lazy, disjointed Sixties pop. *Under Milk Wood* is like being trapped in the mind of Organ Morgan, the unhappy organist from the Dylan Thomas poem of the same name, who cries out "Help!" in his sleep because of the horrific music he imagines. He should stop

Crystalline forms, streams of melt-water and strange harmony

eating cheese on toast and listening to Khanate just before bed and give the buzzing beauty of the new collaboration between **Strings Of Consciousness** and **Angel** a try instead. *Strings Of Consciousness* is, at its core, a string quartet augmented with guitars, electronics and other instruments. They may well play free music but they're disciplined, and everything they do breathes beautifully. Joining them are Ilpo Väisänen (Pan Sonic), Dirk Dresselhaus (Schneider TM) and cellist

Hildur Gudnadóttir (Múm), who add a certain blissful friction and unease to the soundscape.

David Tibet has spent his entire life pondering death. This is not just the preserve of artists, though; it is the kind of bug-eyed, eschatological lunatic-think that so many modern religious groups deal in; people who believe in the apocalypse to such an extent that they are helping bring it about via a perverse act of global wish fulfillment. There's nothing wrong with this fascination; it's an absorbing, if not essential, subject for study. But given the former Psychic TV acolyte's immersion in it you'd think he'd be able to raise more than a querulous wail; his part in **Æthenor's** *Faking Gold And Murder* is no more than a schoolboy's tear falling into the void upon realising his own mortality. He comes across as a pallid imitation of his former mentor Genesis P-Orridge. But never fear, because the rest of this record is immaculate, especially the astounding work of percussionists Nicolas Field and Alexandre Babel. They rage against the dying of the light, eloquent in their wordlessness.

The arrival of a new **Final** album is the kind of thing that can inspire a forwards Shackleton, pushing me out of the warm kitchen and towards the spider-filled garage, into the brother-in-law's climbing gear and out into a snow-covered Finsbury Park. Justin Broadrick founded **Final** when he was just a boy in the early Eighties, living in a commune with his parents long after hippy idealism had been corrupted by heroin. Collage and electronics were quickly outshone by his involvement in grindcore and Godflesh, but **Final** has always been there, quietly humming away in the background. Of course, once out into the evening, the park is packed full of people having fun, building snowmen and running around, the years falling from them. There's no need for silly boys thinking about dying tonight. The high pitched squeal and roaring crackle of *Reading All The Right Signs Wrong* is actually full of shattering crystalline forms, streams of melt-water and strange harmony; the perceived horror of post-industrial society blanketed with beauty, even if only for a night or two.



retaliate, celebrate

Words: **Melissa Bradshaw**

Illustration: **Olimpia Zagnoli**

Extra Golden

Thank You Very Quickly (Thrill Jockey)

We, 'The West', are bipolar when it comes to music of 'other' origin. On the one hand, it's an accessory to the urbane, ghetto-chic kids in faux bling and tribal patterns rushing upon the latest sound from somewhere a bit developing. Over the past few years, we've seen the emergence of baile funk, kwaito, kuduro and cumbia into the mainstream, and MIA dancing around the jungle in Sri Lanka – or was that Angola? – with the natives. Alternatively, 'other' music is the domain of the beardy, guys who know all of the Palm Pictures' back catalogue, spend their Saturdays in Sterns and would probably sneer at you if you asked what a nyatiti was. If you find the first type to be shallow-verging-on-racist, and the second terrifying – but realise that both are symptomatic of an inexorably shrinking world which proffers many pleasures – you must buy this. Both stereotypes have their irony: ghetto-chic genuinely expands the club world, and beardy guys are responsible for some of the best musical fun ever.

The latter has one example in Extra Golden: the band was formed when Otieno Jagwasi helped Ian Eagleson with his doctoral research on benga, Kenyan guitar-based dance music which transcribes the syncopated melodies of the nyatiti – a traditional Kenyan lyre – in the amplifications of rock and roll. Extra Golden enjambs words and members (Onyango Wuod Omari and Alex Minoff, respectively) from Eagleson's Washington, DC band Golden and Jagwasi's Nairobi group, Orchestra Extra Solar Africa. This is their third album, recorded in

Restless and mellifluous

America on the third floor hallway/laundryroom of Eagleson's parents' house, in the Pocono mountains and a mixing studio in DC.

There is a theory that the saddest music in the world is the Irish jig, because its frenetic determination to dance masks centuries of displacement. By turns restless and mellifluous, sharing something of highlife's melodic strumming but with heavier production, Extra Golden's sound is winningly upbeat. As benga is already a rock fusion, you might expect Eagleson and Minoff's influence to overwhelm the Kenyan style, but

the balance is always delicate. 'Fantasies Of The Orient' is sung in both English and Luo, intricate chord patterns sitting comfortably in the lap of thick, swirling guitar licks. The climax is a benga-disco trio: first, 'Anyango', replete with fat organs; then, the slower, euphonic 'Ukimwi', fingerprinted with the effect of Baaba Maal, and closer 'Thank You Very Quickly', etched lovely with soft, rolling snares. Extra Golden's energy and harmony belie interminable hassles: in 2005, Otieno died of liver and kidney disease with HIV, and 'Ukimwi' is a "plea to destroy AIDS".

Thank You Very Quickly is dedicated to everyone who helped the band and their families through the post-election violence of Kenya in 2008 and, back in 2006, Extra Golden attended the Chicago World Music Festival with visa clearance help from the office of Senator Obama; on their sophomore LP, *Hera Ma Nono*, there is a track in his name. So, what wonderful timing that, as a man of Kenyan origin has succeeded to the globe's most important leadership role, an album of Kenyan-American origin occurs to detail and embrace rather than generalise history.

Thank You Very Quickly is no more sad than it is triumphant.

Mike Bones

A Fool For Everyone (Vice)

Mike Strallow seems an anomaly among his New York buddies; signature song 'What I Have Left' is the last thing you'd imagine Gang Gang Dance remixing (it's a Bambi-eyed ode to, well, himself). He's got one of those gruff purrs, deployed with, I imagine, a half-wink and a bit of chest hair showing (indeed, on the album's cover he lies there naked and prostrate, the bastard). It seems a tearjerker movie or teen sitcom is where this balladeering belongs; but, despite my efforts to claim otherwise, I'm as much of a sucker for this type of weep-mongering as the next person. To his credit, Bones realises this and

slurps the truth up with a sneer: "*Put Bright Eyes and I in a room somewhere, "he sings, "You'll never tell us apart."*"

Lauren Strain

Lucio Capece and Mika Vainio Trahnie (Editions Mego)

The idea of Mika Vainio, still associated in the public mind with the bare-bones techno of Pan Sonic, collaborating with Lucio Capece – a Berlin-based, Argentine peer of Keith Rowe, Rhodri Davies and Toshimaru Nakamura – is curious. But the results are extremely interesting. The two find common ground, oddly enough, in the greyscale, pins-and-needles digitalia

that Mego have oft specialised in. Only Capece's clarinet and saxophones, subjected to Seymour Wright levels of respiratory violence, are recognisable as instruments; anonymous scrapes, concrète sounds, hovering synth-tones, crackles and jarring white noise compose much of the picture. While far from reductionist, the sounds are quite sparsely distributed, a keen balance between noise and space adding an air of menace to pieces like 'Hondonada' and 'Ahuyenta Temores', while 'Sahalaitainen' suggests something entirely new, like Pan Sonic if they left the machines to their own devices.

Daniel Barrow

The Chatham Singers

Juju Claudius (Damaged Goods)

Billy Childish keeps it in the family, with wife Julie lending her vocals to an album of tuneful country. 'An Image Of You' has a distinctly stalkerish edge, while 'Upside Mine' is a harmonica-hefty blues rocker, dripping with sex and sung by Billy. It's tempting, but not correct, to read these two tracks as a dialogue between the pair. This is blues, after all, and death lurks: 'The True Story Of Elizabeth Sargent', 'Angel Of Death' and even 'The Good Times' share a distinct mortality. It's classic stuff that could have been written at any time in the last century.

Joe Shooman



ignoring lore

Words: **Matt Evans**

Illustration: **Duncan Barrett**

Wounded Knee

Shimmering New Vistas (Benbecula)

"The older it is, the gooder it is." – Manny, Black Books

The folk music of my own shores rankles. It's the over-familiarity of its conventions and the assumption of genetic affection, of blood fealty to accidental heritage. Edinburgh's Wounded Knee makes folk music of a kind – certainly recognisably British, arguably pure Scottish. But it's folk without true provenance, arising from an aborted history, a frayed timeline that never quite worked out.

He used to be a tabletop noise dude. I first saw him in his second phase, when he began discarding gadgets in favour of simple song. Using a loop pedal and an array of small percussions, he'd layer solo rounds that were playful, if sticky with historical residue. But he pared further, becoming purely a cappella. Then, the lyrics disappeared. He became wordless, abstract. It was as if he was unravelling human history, spurning not

only the 21st Century, or civilisation, but verbal communication itself.

His first 'proper' album finds him still growing his own history, root to berry. First, the slyly slinky 'My Wooden Cupboard', all human beatbox chuggery, digeridoo registers and siren howls, is an unlikely cousin of Marilyn Manson's 'Beautiful People'. The sole lyric manifests as a warding chant – *"My wooden cupboard has an evil eye"* – both portentous and faintly absurd. 'Bools Rules', a hearty folk round about...err...crown

Unravelling human history, spurning communication itself

green bowling, fair swells with the revelries of summer and the bonhomie of honest gamesmanship. It's a lost chunk of oral history, a not-even-forgotten but never-was traditional arrangement. The first time you hear it, you'll have known it for years.

Wounded Knee regresses further with the atavistic 'Rif On The Kif': heat haze over scrubland, cave daub and the crushing weight of a despoiling future. The existence of humankind is at least

acknowledged on 'River Song', as he piles up freeform plainsong, a monastic Richard Youngs mired in tar. He gets to showboat his cavernous pipes, too, his tone not just subterranean but lying prostrate on the floor of a sub-basement in the Kingdom Of The Mole People. The stillness here is not that of a river but the whisper of granite.

Then, there's the centrepiece, 20 minutes of vocal abstraction, drones, gurgles, gibberish and mutating maxillary percussion. The loops pile up, diminish and are constantly usurped, allowing Wounded Knee to imperceptibly segue from garbled sound poetry to funk-up embouchure to oceanic drone. A simple mantra of *"Gonna move to Atlanta"* brings things to an ambiguous close with dour, cheery intoning and death-defying baritone swoops. It's not really right to call this work. That implies strenuousness, effort against resistance, conceptual heaviness. And, despite all of its (pre-) historical resonances and ominous hugeness, *Shimmering New Vistas* is in essence the sound of a man hard at play. Listening to it feels like a privilege; it allows you to intimately experience in real time what another human being does for fun when they're fairly sure that no one else is around (no, not that...) It's beautiful, vast, ancient, slightly silly, and funky as fungus.

Dananananaykroyd

Hey Everyone (Best Before)

Listening to *Hey Everyone*, it's hard to imagine that members of this band break sweaty electro and breakcore joints. With their Dananananaykroyd hats on, the Glaswegian sextet rock the kind of effervescent indie that makes Klaxons sound like Jeff Mills; it would be reductionist, but not totally harsh or inaccurate, to call *Hey Everyone* an updated take on what Superchunk were 'garnering' 'plaudits' for in the early Nineties, updated by virtue of the production (which was handled by someone called Machine, who normally deals with youth metal bands). Gotta say, the fact that

over half of these 13 tracks have previously been released somewhat takes the gloss off what should be something of a banner release. But if you're just peering in now, it won't make much difference.

Noel Gardner

DAT Politics

Mad Kit (Chicks On Speed)

French trio DAT Politics are musical ADD, hyperactive electronica layered in a sugar-rush bounce, full of frantic voices imploring you to get up'n'groove. 2006's *Wow Twist* was particularly addictive, the vocals amped up to a pennywhistle pitch, the songs deliriously short and sweet. Three years on

and *Mad Kit* is similarly effervescent, a bundle of glitchy beats. Even so, it doesn't quite have the charm of its predecessor; if what made *Wow Twist* so appealing was its fat-free chirpiness, here the tracks are surprisingly leaden, veering ever closer to the electro-house of compatriot Ed Banger's school of noise. They still offer high fun and low consequence, but DAT Politics are best consumed in small doses.

Sam Lewis

Dan Deacon

Bromst (Carpark)

Where its predecessors extolled shared visions and achievements, this record speaks

from a single vantage point rather than a collective view, proclaims the exhilaration of being a supersensitive, lucky itinerant in a world – a real world, rather than the gamey levels and cartoon landscapes of *Spiderman Of The Rings* – of boundless fascination. There's a distinctly folk feel, most notably in the sampling of 'The Day Is Past And Gone' for standout track 'Wet Wings', and Deacon's use of thumb piano, pianola and choir is a welcome expansion of the densely programmed nanotones of yore. These songs are still recognisably hectic, brave and loving, they still move upward and outward unembarrassedly, and the naivety of the vocals, their open appeal

to better nature, will still divide the grudging from the willing; only be willing, not just because the world is beautiful, but because this album is accomplished enough to quieten the cynic behind every major chord.

Petra Davis

The Decemberists

The Hazards Of Love (Rough Trade)

"There's an odd bond between the music of the British folk revival and classic metal," said Decemberists frontman Colin Melay in a recent interview. Yes, there is: interminable strumming, misplaced nostalgia, towering narratives that end badly, etc. This record begins with something that sounds like *The Neverending Story* soundtrack: sweeping, grandiose, it's Atreyu's theme, only with Bastian warbling a nasal folk-rock karaoke over the melody. Then it gets proggy and wrong (and continues in that vein), with embarrassing Led Zep guitars twangling and jangling all over the place while Melay e-nun-ci-ates a series of excruciating lyrics about Young Margaret, whoever the hell she is (poor little esoteric dead thing, to be balladeered about so baldly!) And then there are those Celt-inflected vocals over a bunch of rawkin' axe licks that sound like late-era Genesis. One hopes it's a joke, but one gets the sinking feeling that it probably isn't. There are some entertaining moments: every so often a big-voiced female vocalist is wheeled out for a stupendous turn (Shara Worden, Becky Stark, or one of the guest stars playing cameo in the whole great prog-folk tragedy) and then wheeled back in again. And the guitar strums on. And on.

Jesse Darlin'

The Deer Tracks

Aurora (Despotz)

"Wounds may never heal again," suggests Elin Lindfors in a delicate purr, moments before *Aurora's* opening gambit 'Yes This Is My Broken Shield' explodes into a flurry of guitar and piano. As an introduction to this Swedish boy-girl duo it's both mournful and euphoric, setting the tone for a debut album in which deep somnolence rests alongside skittering rushes of warmth. Hailing from the city of Gävle, the pair recorded these songs beneath, wait for it, a three-ton straw model goat, the aim being a set that could (as title hints) adequately soundtrack the phenomenon of the Northern Lights. That they succeed points towards an innately Scandinavian faculty for twinkling, ethereal beauty, and while *Aurora* occasionally drifts into the soporific, it does so in a beguiling manner.

James Skinner

Durty Goodz

Ultrasound (Awkward)

First thoughts, before it's even hit the deck? It's not the promised album *Born Blessed*. Eighteen months after it was trailed on the back of his flawless debut EP 'Axiom', that album is still to come. Officially, this is the 'pre-album'. So you figure this one's gonna have all the B-grade stuff, right? Nitpickers could note there are a few recycled choruses in the final stretch, but they're fools if the context is forgotten. That is: over a dozen tracks of literally hype flows, where Goodz awes with his poise at double time like a Jamaican Twista with the casual charm of Devin The Dude on sugar instead of weed. On 'Grime Killers' Durty slays (among

loads of others) those who are "diluting the culture"; on 'More To The Floor' he skillfully smirks a generic electro beat in an effort to kill, well, electro. These're all elements that help establish *Ultrasound* as world class, the equal of anything you'll hear from the UK this year. But the status is sealed by the way Goodz understands and represents his hardcore culturally. Not being tricky, just playful in a quest to prove his purist vision — that he's got the realest shit, and that everyone loves him for it. For sure, if they don't now they will soon.

Ringo P Stacey

Emeralds

What Happened (No Fun Productions)

Noise's infatuation with the distressed synthesiser dates back to the late Seventies and early Eighties, where new, compact Korg and Roland models proved the perfect tool for the sonic terrorist on a budget. But while Ohio trio Emeralds sit firmly within the modern noise nexus — last year's debut, *Solar Bridge*, saw the light of day on ex-Wolf Eye Aaron Dilloway's Hanson, while *What Happened* arrives on No Fun Fest curator Carlos Giffoni's imprint — their sound harks back to a somewhat earlier age: specifically, kosmische mid-Seventies synth explorers like Cluster and Klaus Schulze, whose languid, gently cosmic washes of electric drone provided a heightened sense of stasis that stood in sharp contrast to motorik's pulsing motion. Five tracks here find John Elliott and Steve Hauschildt's synths pitched head to head, high, twinkling oscillations exploding spark-like over heavy, contoured bass tones, with guitarist Mark McBride appearing at opportune moments to add languid melodies that circle in tight, atomic orbits. Transcendent stuff, with 'Damaged Kids' offering the one moment of serious discord, discombobulated fragments drifting into gentle motion around the midpoint before building to peaks of bleak, droning intensity.

Louis Pattison

Enablers

Tundra (Exile On Mainstream)

Fogged-up lungs belch descriptions of empty scenes: bleak kitchens, dead-end roads, car lights penetrating voids. Words dissipate and re-string themselves, assuming new, nightmarish mutations. A molten communion of oddly clean guitars and desperate, detuned drums — like flat tyres — ebbs beneath, and such quiet devastation continues for half an hour, amassing poetic carcasses, apocalyptic references, flirtations with final sins. *Tundra* is a necessary but uncomfortable portrait of vocalist Pete Simonelli's Jekyll/Hyde split, and a similarly burdensome lesson in deflected power as Enablers' last release, 2006's *Output Negative Space*. *Tundra* is limited to a run of 1200 copies only — all presented in hand-screened wooden boxes with velvet inlays — possibly because wide exposure to its darkness would encourage an even greater slump in national morale.

Lauren Strain

Frightened Rabbit

Quietly Now! Midnight Organ Fight Live And Acoustic At The Captain's Rest (FatCat)

A cynic might question the validity of releasing a live and acoustic version of an album not a year since its original incarnation, but the



Various

Dark Was The Night (4AD)

Lots of goodies on this double compilation, released in aid of HIV arts charity Red Hot. Previous Red Hot albums have proven epochal in their way: 1990's *Red Hot And Blue* provided a selection of Cole Porter covers by the likes of Tom Waits and Salif Keita; *No Alternative* collected alt-stalwarts aplenty to broker a dialogue about HIV with the nascent MTV2 generation. *Dark Was The Night* features new work by Sufjan Stevens and Arcade Fire, duets between Grizzly Bear and Feist, Conor Oberst and Gillian Welch. Antony Hegarty's cover of Dylan's 'I Was Young When I Left Home' deserves special mention; his vocal tendresse pours warm molasses over Bryce Dessner's stoical picking. Dirty Projectors and David Byrne's 'Knotty Pine' manages grace and purpose, Byrne and Longstreth shoring up a melody like a picket line. Best of all, Kronos Quartet bend their melancholy around Blind Willie Johnson's 'Dark Was The Night', the moan and rattle and glottal stop eloquently makeshift by fingers and strings.

Petra Davis

powerful intimacy displayed here should dispel any lingering doubts. Scott Hutchison's impassioned howl is blunt, his questing lyrics propelled by a crackled, formidably tight 'Rabbit. The reason why *Midnight Organ Fight* has been taken to heart by so many lies, perhaps, in the album's commendable grasp of juxtaposition; deft melodic touches are married to the most devastating home truths. When James Graham of The Twilight Sad takes lead vocal duties on 'Keep Yourself Warm', the result is every bit as electrifying as an acoustic performance allows.

James Skinner

Santiago Latorre

Órbita (Accretions)

Barcelona-based studio engineer and saxophonist Santiago Latorre's final year university project saw him tackle the sonification of the human genome. For his debut album, *Órbita*, he swaps microscope for telescope and joins the swirl of the celestial dancefloor. A mix of elegant jazz and gentle electronica, *Órbita* is ostensibly inspired by the planets' rotation and the unavoidable progress of time, its cyclical melodies departing in the flush of youth and returning with careworn faces and crumpled edges. 'Canon' sets the theme, its fresh, hearty sax tones slowly twisting into an atonal tangle. The title of 'Le Sobrevive, Le Sobrevive A Todo La Frialdad' turns from an individual chant into a crowd cry, and 'Viajando En Rosa' warps and wobbles from glassy tones into accordion, waltzing forward like diamond-anniversary tea-dancers. So the planets turn. But *Órbita* is less a dispassionate *memento mori* than a warm, optimistic hymn to experience.

Abi Bliss

Francisco Lopez and

Lawrence English

HB (Baskaru)

Taking the tried and tested route of exchanging soundfiles and mutually reworking the results back and forth, Francisco Lopez and Lawrence English have produced a collaboration which achieves an unusual state of grace. The source material is deliberately obscured, though there's some kind of birdsong throughout. Whether it's artificial in origin is moot; by the time each artist has applied his effects and processing, the results rustle with somnolence. And not much happens; but not much happens with all the fractal importance of a Daoist parable. Any description of what the sounds *do* becomes a lot less important

than the conclusion that they simply *are*. Listening via headphones in competition with a bus ride, with street noise and the untreated sounds of nature all around, becomes not so much an experience of opposition as of complementary absorption.

Richard Fontenoy

Love Is All

A Hundred Things Keep Me Up At Night (What's Your Rupture?)

Love Is All are psyched. It's probably one of the things that keeps them up at night. These Swedish popsters have a way with accelerated, vaguely shouty indie-punk that's *packed* with melody. Singer Josephine Olausson has an unhinged, Jemima Pearl element to her, but with a better-used singing voice and a greater willingness to articulately splurge her discontent into song. 'Big Bangs, Black Holes, Meteorites' encases her paranoia perfectly. One key difference between this and debut record *Nine Times That Same Song* is that saxophonist Fredrik Eriksson has left, and the ex-quintet have become a tighter quartet. They sound less like Deerhoof than they did three years ago and more like a fuller Life Without Buildings. They still use the sax. They love to dance. They'd love *you* to as well. You'll almost certainly have no choice.

Tom Howard

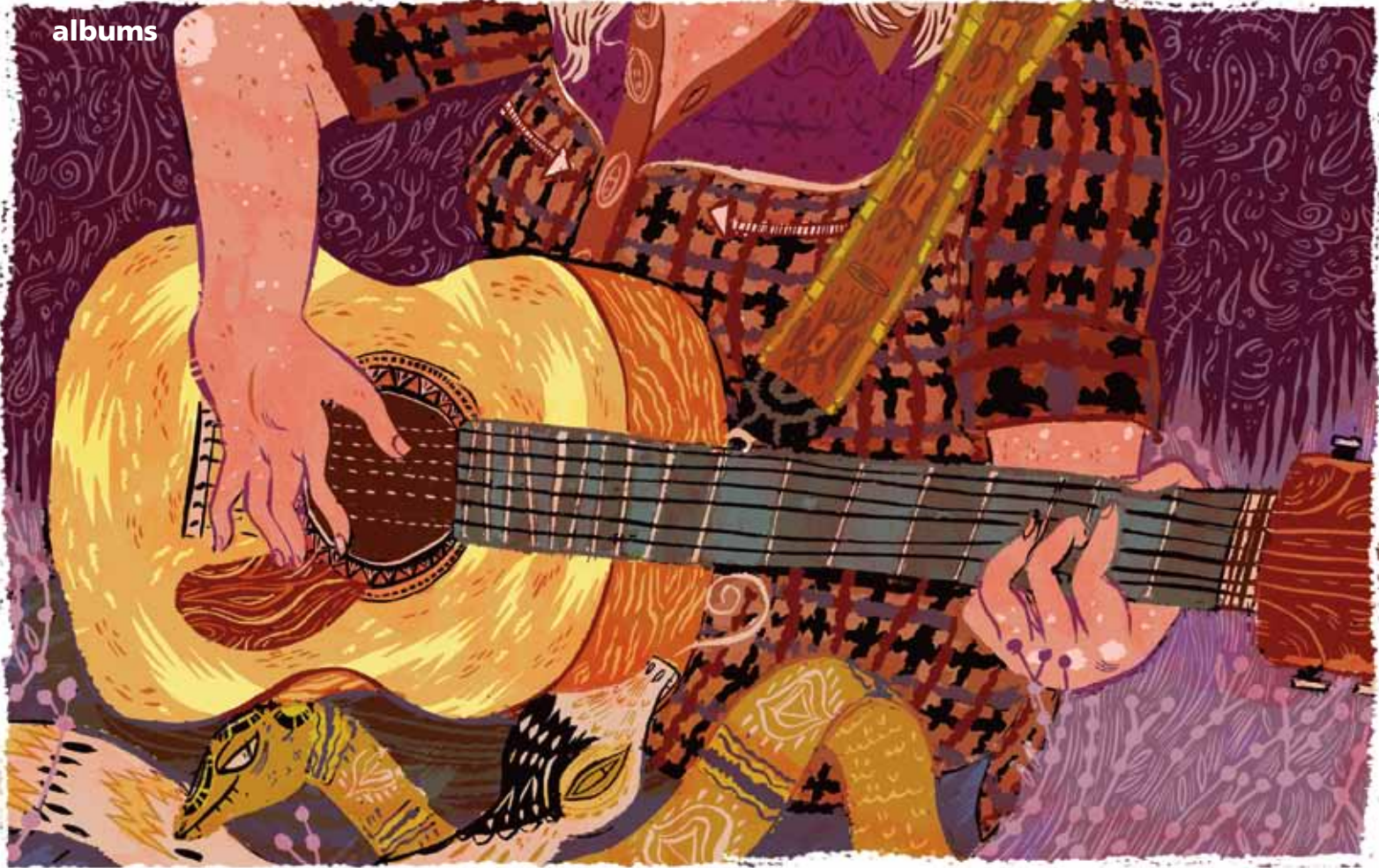
Terry Lynn

Kingstonlogic 2.0 (Phree)

Giving Jamaican music a kick out of the dance hall and onto a broader international stage is only part of what Terry Lynn and producer Phred are about. Throughout this travelogue around contemporary Kingston, the everyday problems of gangsters, guns, death squads and grinding poverty in the ghetto are thrown into sharp relief. In time-honoured fashion, they remix and expand the palette of buckshot beats and swivelling bass, bringing in technoid rhythms and references.

Kingstonlogic is a supercharged new vision of Daft Punk's *Technologic* made brightly afresh thanks to Lynn's inner city perspective. She touches on every concern of that record in a rapid-fire litany of injustice. Given the state of the globe right now, things aren't likely to get much better; but, as 'IMF' and 'Politricks' explain, maybe they're bad enough already. It's not all negativity, though, as Lynn stamps out her ambition to escape; the concluding 'Rivers Of Babylon' rewinds the simple answer: one love.

Richard Fontenoy



to be sad, to be high

Words: **Lauren Strain**

Illustration: **Meg Hunt**

Contemplating growing pains and the plague of contentment with a bunch of American and Canadian songwriters as yr mentors

Julie Doiron: *I Can Wonder What You Did With Your Day* (JagJaguwar)

Bill Callahan: *Sometimes I Wish We Were An Eagle* (Drag City)

Vetiver: *Tight Knit* (Bella Union)

Neko Case: *Middle Cyclone* (Anti-)

"I dreamed it was a dream you were gone/I woke up feeling ripped by reality" – 'Eid Ma Clack Shaw', Bill Callahan

Against a wash of poster paint stands a girl in white, whiskers daubed on her cheeks and cat's ears clipped to her headband. Next to her, there's a smaller kid in a black bat's cloak looking moody and insincere. They're just two children playing dress-up on the front cover of **Julie Doiron's** ninth solo album, but maybe there's something more to this picture. Maybe the one in ivory lace symbolises, well, childhood innocence; and the other? That moment when we realise happiness is never uncomplicated, that there's always a nugget of doubt waiting in the wings. It's a pretty gauche reading of an inconspicuous drawing, but still: the acknowledgment of a 'fall' is one of the central tenements in Julie Doiron's oeuvre. *I Can Wonder What You Did With Your Day* sees her battling away such demons, though; it's less about a faltering descent from the obliviousness of childhood and more about an attempt to find a similarly uncluttered, enchanted way of viewing the world as an adult. "If I were a tailor, I could make you a tie," she sings on 'Tailor'; "If I were a baker, I might bake those things you like, and I won't mind taking my time". The focus lands on those non-committal words, 'might' and 'could', and it's almost as

though her admission that she may not be able to do these things is what makes her sound so genuine. "It's always nice to come home after getting lots done," she coos; "I slip off my boots, take off all my coats... And I think of you in New Brunswick, I think of you in your little house". She's addressing her husband and children, but it's not sickly or smug. She enunciates with a child's relish, tonguing vowels as though they're glazed in jam: "We close our hands on the metal bars, open our mouths and sing out loud to each other". Her voice appleblossom rich, the melody capacious.

We are addicted to inflicting and receiving injury

Similarly, **Bill Callahan's** *Sometimes I Wish We Were An Eagle* marks a desire for a return to simplicity; but implies that this is an unachievable goal. "It seemed like a routine face at first," he caws on 'Jim Cain', remembering a relationship, "with a death of the shadow and a lightness of step" – but he knows this happy, 'routine face' is temporary. "Love is the king of the beasts," he spits throughout 'Eid Ma Clack Shaw' in a stiff, bitter riposte to unshifting pain, providing an easy in-route to this album's main theme; we are addicted to inflicting (and receiving) injury. "Last night I swear I felt your touch, gentle and warm – how?!" he shudders, querulous at the ghostly grasp of something long dead. Even when recalling times of togetherness, love is figured as a weapon; in 'Rococo Zephyr', 'she' is torn from her roots, wounded and gaping:

"She lay beside me like a branch from a tender willow tree", he pines, voice buttery and charred; "a fiercer force had wrenched her from where she used to be." Where Doiron finds rest, Callahan discovers no such easy plateau. Instrumentally, Callahan's work beneath his full name has lacked much of the terror of Smog, but the way the music now gleams with posture and propriety, full of clucking violins and a plum double bass, renders his torments all the more harrowing. "I am a child of linger-on," he bleats, a tickle of cymbals like the inappropriate blush of a new season while Callahan is still marooned in winter.

Meanwhile, **Vetiver** frontman Andy Cabic's medicine for (e)motion sickness would seem to be that ol' American trope, the wide open road. "Nothin' escapes the rolling sea/Not the past, nor you, nor me," he implores, as though our histories and memories could be absolved, dissolved, with the lap of water. While *Tight Knit's* modest scores flush with lap steel and prickly percussion, it's thisvpreoccupation with wandering that renders Vetiver too, well, *distant*. Doiron and Callahan's incisions barely miss bone, but Cabic's words are vague. Compare his "I wanna be near you, now that you are here lying just next to me/How happy we'd both be" to Callahan's abject, maimed willow branch; Cabic's telling seems almost embarrassingly optimistic and, if not naïve, certainly unrealistic.

Then, there's **Neko Case**. *Middle Cyclone* comes dressed 'n' doused in all the trappings of being a premier league *artiste* – there are all these unnecessary orchestras and waterfalls of sugar-water sheen everywhere. Through such a mesh of gauze and smoke it's difficult to discern the ex-New Pornographer's words gurning and crunching like they used to; worst of all, *Middle Cyclone* is the sound of a once fire-hearted girl being twisted into a sort of atypical, Mojo-trumpeted frame of womanhood by convention, and it's icky to listen to. I'm not ready to align myself with the kind of adulthood that completely disassociates itself from childhood fears, from lasting insecurities. Not yet, no.

Men Of Unitus

Gland Of Hope And Glory (No Lite)

It's the titles, first of all: I don't know whether to find it worrying that 'If You're Happy And You Know It, Clap Your Glands' tickles my ribs. Or that the artwork, which my younger, more morbid self probably could have assembled (the disc itself features an inverted cross which is also a dribbling penis) gives me giggles. Probably. Well, the music corrects all that, though it is just as onanistically fixated on sonic violence: harsh, pummelling thrash with a particularly scuzzy edge of rusty-razor treble and frantic, vicious drums. In one particularly fine moment, on the penultimate 'Look Ma, No Glands' (hee!), the entire ensemble collapses into a brawling chaos of dirty feedbacking frequencies and manic tubthumping. The voice, supplied by Hey Colossus and Bromancer member, Paul, does a particularly neat line in relentless gravel-throat screams, modulating into shrieks and bass growls at random as if enjoying a joke at the listener's expense. Well, Paul, you bastard, we enjoy it too.

Daniel Barrow

Mi Ami

Watersports (Touch And Go/Quarterstick)

Suffused with anxiety, this record is equal parts outburst and restraint, equal parts dance and drama. Sonically, Mi Ami swim about in a boggy patch of ground stretching from the 13th Floor Elevators to Suicide (and spilling out of those vague parameters); rhythmically, they spin on their heels betwixt Afrobeat and a slugged-up Slits. Featuring two ex-members of Dischord's Black Eyes, Mi Ami have kept the polyrhythmic flame of their old band alive and they're unleashing the same frantic vocal style. But! However! Mi Ami are doused in dub in a way that Black Eyes never were. They reverberate, echo and slide, tripping over their own feet, hypnotising their own riffs until beginnings and endings meld together. Delayed, monotonous guitars loop over and over, while Daniel Martin-McCormick yelps lyrical about "The man in your house! The movement in your house!" in a manner that suggests he probably *is* the man in your house. The intensity is palpable.

Hayley Avron

Micachu And The Shapes

Jewellery (Rough Trade)

Deservedly the cover star of January's mag, wonky-tonk producer and songwriter Micachu combines a Sparks-ish pop sensibility with the weird electro factor of early-era Kevin Blechdom and a brand new thang all her own. It's pretty difficult to describe this stuff 'cause it feels genuinely new in some way; but still, I'm going to try. Here are some things you can expect from this album: cartoonish sound effects, joyfully unlovely vocal samples, heavy bass beats, squeaks and glitches, jamming and scratching, fuzz, flange, the whisper of cowbells, catchy, somersaulting melodies, sweetly dark lyrics and Kinky guitars that shit on everything the LDN indie boys are currently churning out from their haircut factories. And, for all that, it's listenable and kind of cute, and dancey, too.

If that hasn't piqued your interest then you're probably some kind of pantyliner

in haircut's clothing, but I don't believe that such a person can exist in 2009. Hit it.

Jesse Darlin'

Mikhail

Morphica (Sub Rosa)

Morphica is an album of remixes; or, more specifically, an album that thinks about remixes, and what a remix can be. Its starting point is *Orphica*, the 2007 album by London sound artist and sometime Björk collaborator Mikhail Karikis, which *Morphica* sets out to dissect from every angle. So, there are three CDs – titled 'Electronics', 'Voices', and 'Strings', featuring re-fixes by the likes of DJ Spooky, medieval vocal group Alamire Consort and electroacoustic composer Bob Krilic – plus a generously-sized box of postcards, essays, artwork, rearranged lyrics, and even a CD holder that can be flipped inside-out. One constant is Mikhail's voice, passionate and towering, in a Björk-ish vein. But while diversity is Mikhail's stated aim, *Morphica* feels to remain within boundaries. While a remix can prime an original for the dancefloor or obliterate it entirely, this collection feels somewhat academic in tone, seldom venturing outside the polite confines of the chamber. While this gives the project a certain coherency many remix collections lack, you can't help but feel that was never the maker's intention.

Louis Pattison

NLF3

Ride On A Brand New Time (Prohibited)

Although the album title might suggest a slightly disorientated Black Box, this French trio deal in a kind of dislocated, heavily rhythmic psych-exotica which, despite the use of kalimbas and ukuleles, steers clear of ersatz worldliness and winds up squarely in the realm of the ecstatic. Comparisons can be made, but only with qualification. For example, 'Ride On Ride On' sounds a little like LA tub-thumpers HEALTH, but it's considerably more colourful and less mournful; and just as a dizzy melody or circular drum pattern urges you to neatly box 'em alongside Boredoms, Os Mutantes and Liars, the blissful pulse of 'Fuses, Apes And Doppler' hovers into view, a song so simultaneously tremulous and brave it makes me want to heave big, gulping, cathartic sobs. While we're talking emotion, special mention should be made of the vocals: wordless, enraptured, woven into the rich fabric of the music, they aim for the inarticulate speech of the heart and hit the spot with remarkable accuracy, illustrating just how useful a democratic approach to sound can be for blasting open lines of communication.

Joseph Stannard

Papercuts

You Can Have What You Want (Memphis Industries)

Step aboard Papercuts' third album and depart on a late night transatlantic flight into the skies. Drawing inspiration from the twilight zone, Californian Jason Quever pilots his Concorde flight through dense Sixties organ, spaced-out shuffling drums and faraway vocals to produce a soundscape of dreamy pop. Recorded on tape, the rough analogue sheen brings Papercuts closer to earth; 'Future Primitive' is distortion-edged and 'Once We Walked In

under my stylus: telepathe



"One of our favourite and most inspirational albums is *Liquid Swords* by GZA, produced by RZA. There are many reasons we love this album, but the first is that it references the 1980 movie



Shogun Assassin, one of our favourites. The title of the album is a metaphor for GZA's tongue – lyrics – as a physical sword. Each song samples some overdubbed dialogue and music from the soundtrack, like the pitch-bent eerie synth at the beginning of '4th Chamber'. Also, '4th Chamber' uses the quote "Choose the sword and you will join me, choose the ball and join your mother in death." GZA has carefully chosen his samples throughout the entire album. He has brilliantly taken them out of their original context and used them to illustrate his own narrative on *Liquid Swords*, while still appropriating the themes of the movie. One of the most common themes to be found on the album is that of survival and making necessary decisions to keep living. The album is both visual and visceral, just like the film it samples. Wu-Tang Clan created an entire philosophy of living and making music based on martial arts films. We can respect and relate to this, because we have created our own world and rules both for living and music making." (Melissa Livaudais and Busy Gangnes)

The Sunlight' is full of hollow distances. 'The Wolf', with its high vocals and pushing organs, awakens the album from a certain melancholy. It's not even a druggy record as such, more a misty, inebriated shoe-gaze languor; like a gossamer Cocteau Twin hiding beneath that mirrored haze as you drift through the night.

Alex Goffey

Peter, Bjorn And John

Living Thing (Wichita)

The chemical compound that made 2006's *Writer's Block* a divine alchemy seems to be missing a few crucial elements here. *Living Thing* is pretty patchy. From the first note (a ghoulish echo of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'), the trio announce their boredom with indie guitar pop, throwing themselves at the R&B charts like a trio of trolls. Props to Peter, Bjorn And John for taking such a risk, but the standard of quality here teeters up and down like a teeter totter. On one hand, there are serious alchemical productions ('It Don't Move Me', 'I Want You') and Tangerine Dreams of yore ('Last Night') and, on the other, there's lugubrious pub rock ('Lay It Down') and a corny cut about misunderstood paintings in Barcelona ('Blue Period Picasso'). It's like the trio got roughed up by electronic doodads in the studio – and liked it! My advice to you: edit the LP into a stellar EP to better illustrate Peter, Bjorn And John's confused emotions.

Shane Moritz

Petit Mal

Petit Mal (Difficult Fun)

Ben and Melanie take their name from a type of seizure, approximating the same reaction you'd get if you played this album to an aerobics class. Their appeal is magnetic; Ben pulls fantastic geometric shapes from a cold-sounding synthesiser, programming whirlybird beats, echoes and reusing Eighties nightclub refuse, while Melanie charts the European credit crisis. The result is strangely enchanting. Her imperious drone deserves its own ruinous castle, festooned in filigrees of deception and fog. She's capable of hypnosis; the musical equivalent of a gaze that stares unblinkingly into your bank

account and rolls its eyes at the state of your balance. She throws her monotone in the air, sings it like she just don't care. In a weird way, this kind of disaffection is totally hot.

Shane Moritz

Poni Hoax

Images Of Sigrid (Tigersushi)

Poni Hoax walk the tricky tightrope of danceable indie. Lyrics drip with practised sleaze, and all the mentions are there: girls, the city, fading romance. Mostly unimaginative fare, then – see 'The Bird Is On Fire', a warm-up exercise in sexless, jerking pop – but *Images Of Sigrid* is occasionally self-sabotaged by endearing mad professor touches. 'Pretty Tall Girls' is like Christmas Day with a kid who just got a cheap Casio, the playful plinks nearly justifying pointless guitar excesses. But Poni Hoax plough an undeniably strong furrow on 'Antibodies', dry drums, clipped guitars and solid disco keys that feels like a fruit machine jackpot. Still, on balance, they've barely broken even.

Thom Gibbs

Red Velvet

Red Velvet (KML)

B For Bang guitarist David Chalmin was last seen splurging sheets of skronk over Chris Corsano and Massimo Pupillo in their Dimension X sci-fi-stravaganza. Red Velvet is an altogether more Personal And Serious project – equal parts jutting riffs, tastefully restrained electronics and cripplingly delicate, sensitive and emotionally translucent passages. The aim is apparently ultra-dynamic catharsis, and sometimes it works: the flechette riff to 'Stay And Stare' flays gloriously, its every note perfectly wrong. But mostly what we have here is a pretty wearying overload of naked pain and big rock angst with an immaculate production sheen – essentially, a post-hardcore Linkin Park. You can't fault Red Velvet for emotional honesty ('Prayer For The Dead, Prayer For You' tackles bereavement in a truly stark fashion that's pretty hard to take), and this is clearly part of some healing process for Chalmin. But seriously, that wound's never going to scab over if you keep picking at it.

Matt Evans



Autorace
Autorace
(Hovercraft)
Assembled from the remains of the Furtips, who were kind of

like Holland's answer to Pavement, if Pavement had kept their first drummer and slowly gone insane. From 'Kinky Thinking Monkey Underground', the line: "You slept with the best band in the world!" Forsooth! (SM)



Bishop Allen
Grrr...
(Dead Oceans)
In a career that has seen Bishop Allen's core duo appear in the

acclaimed 'mumblecore' films of Andrew Bujalski as well as releasing an EP every month for a year, they've also found the time to turn out a second album of American indie-pop. Winsome. (JS)



Butcher Boy
React Or Die (How Does It Feel To Be Loved?)
Stuart Murdoch reckons this is

"a real classy record from start to finish" — naysayers, take that as you will. These Glaswegians adopt the darker side of pop and add more strings and melodrama for a second album that's full of finesse, like Tindersticks' halcyon days. (AG)



Deleted Waveform
Gatherings
Baby Warfare
(Rainbow Quartz)
The buzz hits you in

no time. You tell your friends about how good it is, how this large shipment of sweet-smelling Norwegian country rock reminds you of Wilco's beeriest rockers and you scream "Yahoo!" like the dorks you usually make fun of. The buzz fades, but it was certainly good while it lasted. (SM)



Joe Gideon And The Shark
Harum Scarum
(Bronzerat)
Emerging triumphant from the ashes

of acclaimed leftfield rockers Bikini Atoll, this brother-sister duo ply wryly menacing, emphatic monologues set against a swampy backdrop. The ghost of Nick Cave can never be entirely exorcised, but this remains an engrossing listen. (JS)



Its A Buffalo
Don't Be Scared
(Akoustik Anarchy)
Chiming guitars and a two-pronged vocal attack come

courtesy of this touted, retro-styled quartet from Manchester. Crowded with half-melodies and lacking any significant dynamic contrast, the brio with which *Don't Be Scared* is played can't mask a lack of distinction. Unfortunately, this record becomes grating through repeated exposure. (JS)



Ben Klock
One (Ostgut Ton)
After numerous 12-inch releases, Berghain resident Klock's first full album

proves that he doesn't need the cavernous Berlin techno club to explore the mind's darkened corners. A giant in velvet slippers kicks your ego while vocalist Elif Bicer is the day-bleached vampire slithering beneath the airlock. (AB)



Lay Low
Farewell Good
Night's Sleep (Cod)
Lovisa Elisabet Sigrunardottir is

London-born but Reykjavik-raised, and her music showcases this partnership; while her melodies and structures are simple and writerly rather than glacial, her voice curdles and curls with her distinguished Icelandic accent. A coy lap steel ups the warmth; simple, and sleepy, but not *quite* complacent. (LS)



Dan Michaelson
And The Coastguards
Saltwater
(Memphis Industries)

Pairing up Absentee's song-writing force with The Magic Numbers' Romeo Stoddart on guitar, this album represses the former's cynicism. What's left are songs like 'Letters', where Michaelson gets as close to a prodigy of Leonard Cohen as is tastefully possible. I'm spellbound. (JF)



Navvy
Idyll Intangible
(Angular)

Breaking news! Sheffield sprigs in four-pronged formulation, making thirsty, snot-nosed racket with tinny drums and guitars as skinny'n'juttery as gangly teen elbows. So: nothing new, really, *but*—these guys are actually better than a lot o' the crop, and kinda like These New Puritans with the drenched fuzz and flurry removed; they've got those fixed stares, that blue blood. (LS)



AC Newman
Get Guilty
(Broken Horse)
Appears AC has kicked his Beatles addiction, a welcome surprise as

it was getting awfully distracting. Rocking it on an acoustic at mid-tempo seems to have saved him some breath. He's into Supertramp and Elton John these days, proving that the seasoned Pornographer has been attending the school of rock and paying attention. (SM)



The Rakes
Klang (V2)
Having described the London music scene as "like wading through a swamp of shit",

The Rakes decamped to Berlin to record their third album. Ironic, then, that *Klang* is so hopelessly mired in the swamp of anonymous London art-slurry. (CL)



Polly Scattergood
Polly Scattergood
(Mute)
Here's some more-than-slightly

skewed angst-pop; all damaged introspection, creepy naivety and bubblegum neurosis. It's ever so slightly worrying and ever so lightly peppered with Beth Gibbons-isms and Kate Bush-ness. Mostly, it's all underpinned quite superbly by some lovely arrangements from cut-above soundtrack bloke Simon Fisher Turner, 'Bunny Club' being a particularly virulent piece of ideal-world Radio Teenpop fodder. (JP)



To Arms Etc
Corner Games
(Bronzerat)
Clean, bright pianos. Twee, observational lyricism. Frequent

bursts of driving choral lines. Solid production values. I mean, there's nothing wrong with anything here. But there's also precious little to recommend *Corner Games*. Save your crunched money for a record that might do more than rattle around the back of your head. (CL)



Various
Final Song #01
(Get Physical)
It seems Laurent Garnier is unafraid

of death; according to this compilation of last requests, the song he'd most like to be played at his funeral is Radiohead's 'Sit Down Stand Up', wherein Thom Yorke gargles a protracted plea to "Waaa-aaalk into the jaws of heee-ell" before pixellating himself with "Rrrrrrr-raindrops". Eek. Meanwhile, DJ Hell — who you would imagine knows a thing or two about this kind of lark — picks The Stranglers' 'Golden Brown'. A few of these selections have probably involved a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek, but ethereal DJ Chloé's more serious choice of her own 'Paradise' sounds about right: resigned but brave, sad but complete. (LS)



Vile Imbeciles
Death Jazz
(Tea Vee Eye)
Right. This is a single, backed with an album type-thing. Odd.

The stumbling rhythms of A-side 'Jennifer' are those of lurching, spacey, minimalist punk-funk, while presumed B-side 'Tramp' is a straightforward, playful exercise in grub-eating, multi-riffing gravel-funk. However, we're hoping that the gormlessly daft-ass, um, other B-side/'mini album', *Death Jazz*, a 30-minute globule of noodling and wanking about, is a deliberate pastiche of Spinal Tap's *Jazz Odyssey*. What... it isn't? Oh. Oh dear. (JSh)

Brief notes by Abi Bliss, Jonathan Falcone, Alex Goffey, Chris Lo, Shane Moritz, James Papademetrie, Joe Shooman, James Skinner, Lauren Strain

Anni Rossi
Rockwell (4AD)

Anni Rossi's slight quirkiness and unorthodox choice of instrument — also, the fact that she's a girl — has led to many comparisons with a certain harpist (though she plays the viola). Such comparisons, however, ignore the fact that Rossi, in demeanour, attitude and boisterous pop inflections, is more *Top Of The Pops* than All Tomorrow's Parties. Rossi has avoided camaraderie with any specific scene, touring with disparate acts like Thanksgiving, Electrelane and, uh, the Ting Tings; on album *Rockwell*, she covers both 'Living In Danger' by Swedish popstars Ace Of Base and her idiosyncratic boyfriend Rollin Hunt's ethereal pop number 'Air Is Nothing'. Named for the Chicago street she lived on, *Rockwell* includes many of the same songs from last year's 'Afton' EP, but these versions resemble Rossi's electrified live performance more closely.

Beth Capper

Seeland

Tomorrow Today (Loaf)

Given the band's partial provenance in Broadcast and Plone, as well as their Neu!-referencing name, it's no surprise to hear echoes of all three groups in Seeland's debut *Tomorrow Today*. That said, those bands are less a template than a general mood-setting, laying down a kind of keyboard-led, easy-going groove, scrambling styles to achieve a certain kind of never-neverland that suggests Saint Etienne at their best (if without a Sarah Cracknell equivalent). Dinky pop ('Hang On Lucifer', 'Captured') bubbles with the kind of goofily pseudo-naïve riffs and melodies that should be soundtracking kids' TV shows beamed in from the past (or Mars), while the vocals aim at smooth understatement instead of hyperactive whimsy. Additionally, Seeland express an air for the epic, but in miniature — consider the incremental melodies on 'Call The Incredible'. This is indie-pop for a new century that still tips its hat to the old one.

Ned Raggett

Soap And Skin

Lovetune For Vacuum (PIAS)

This is as much about Austrian Anja Plaschg's neo-classical, storm-cloud piano as it is about her voice. *Lovetune For Vacuum* is a studiously intense set, roiling and rolling deliriously across barbed faerie heartache; goth with a lower case 'g', thunderously keyed and sumptuously demented. 'Mr Gaunt Pt 1000' is an extraordinary chunk of chopped-up cello and medieval menace, oddly reminiscent of vintage Coil when they had real strings to mangle. 'Turbine Room' and 'Fall Foliage' are starched, aching melodramas that sprout clicks and thumps.

The broad-stroke angst is tempered throughout by Plaschg's judicious, gossamer-fine electro-witchery; it's disorienting, full of false starts and curtailed climaxes, crackles and creaks.

James Papademetrie

DM Stith

Heavy Ghost (Asthmatic Kitty)

These songs are not written, they are woven. Fabricated, with textured cloth and silken

thread, like a patchwork quilt. They're crafted from known sounds, well-worn strings and a tape that hisses heavily, weighed down by the dense atmosphere of the room.

Heavy Ghost is organic; not in the way where you can't think of another word for 'stripped down' or 'bare', but straight from the body, from the physical matter of the man. Lyrics decompose and germinate new ideas, and Stith's compositions are haunting: there is a phantom in his opera. Solid piano chords are pounced upon by a skittering right hand; they play out like birdsong while strings hover like spectres and Stith's cushioned vocals bring the whole affair to an emotional overload.

Hayley Avron

Swan Lake

Enemy Mine (Jagjaguwar)

Canada's inspiringly incestuous pop cooperative (revolving mainly around Spencer Krug) releases another album into the world, this one a gilded lily from indie supertrio Swan Lake. As fans of first album *Beast Moans* will know, Swan Lake exists as a colourful celebration of the pop jam. *Enemy Mine* feels like a space for burning off excess creativity, like some kind of padded pop crèche. But here, Krug, Daniel Bejar and Carey Mercer have managed to retain the crackling energy of *Beast Moans* while inheriting little of its idea-soup messiness. 'Heartswarm' swoons; 'Settle On Your Skin' rocks; muscular opener 'Spanish Gold, 2044' lopes confidently. While *Beast Moans* sounded more like three kids banging separate drums in corners of the studio, this collection is broad and cohesive.

Chris Lo

Synthme

Lasers'n'Shit (Planet Mu)

It's disappointing that Tadao Kikumoto, the creator of the Roland TB-303 – and the unwitting grandfather of acid house – refuses to give interviews. I managed to track down Kikumoto a few years ago and struck up an email conversation with him during which he explained that he was very happy that people still make music using his machine. This acid-drenched release is testament to the continuing relevance of the 303. From the first moments of 'Mimtro', with its haunting bass line and dreamy female vocals, this is acid at its finest. As the album progresses, it reveals more teeth. 'Red' is a fusion of soaring disco strings underpinned by the ever present 303 pulse, and, by the time we reach 'Scotch Paper', the party is in full swing. Synthme's latest is a mind-bending trip down the acid rabbit hole – but it can be a little relentless. Even the biggest fans of the 303 squelch probably shouldn't attempt the whole thing in one sitting.

Stuart Aitken

The Ukrainians

Diaspora (Zirka)

The Ukrainians started out as a kind of jokey side project by Wedding Present guitarist Peter Solowka. Originally conceived for a special Peel session, their Eastern European folk pop, sung in Ukrainian, took off when their debut album caught the attention of the *NME*. 1993's EP of Smiths covers confirmed that there was more to their

frantic mandolins and accordions, and subsequent Velvet Underground and Sex Pistols covers earned them a kind of obscure classic status.

But this joke has grown increasingly serious over the years. Just as their novelty charm was in danger of wearing thin, The Ukrainians' project has, instead, taken on an earnest edge. Earlier investigations into the impact of Western culture and politics on the ex-Soviet Union are followed up on new album *Diaspora*, which sees them reinstate one of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* as the work of a forgotten refugee who the composer ripped off, and T-Rex's 'Children Of The Revolution' is inflected with new poignancy when linked to recent Ukrainian history.

The result is an interesting exploration, but one that risks tipping over into a post-Communist nationalism to which we are not all sure we subscribe.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Various

A Psychedelic Guide to Monsterism Island (Lo)

Pete Fowler's artwork for Super Furry Animals remains one of the most memorable pairings of artist and band around, while his own musical efforts have included a compilation of woozy whimsy from the Sixties. Little surprise, then, that something like this album might be the end result of more recent tinkering, with Fowler, SFA's Gruff Rhys and a host of others creating their own modern equivalent of *Nuggets* but with a broader and different brief.

Thanks to Fowler's open ears for the breadth of variance beneath such a loose, umbrella term as 'psychedelia' – contributors include Jerry Dammers, Luke Vibert and Johnny Trunk amid more unsurprising acts like Richard Norris, Circulus and Richie Crago – the all-instrumental *Monsterism Island* is a free-flowing mélange taking in tropicalia rhythms, electrogaze zone-outs and neo-travelogue soundtracks. Everything fits; perfect for drinking Mai Tais to.

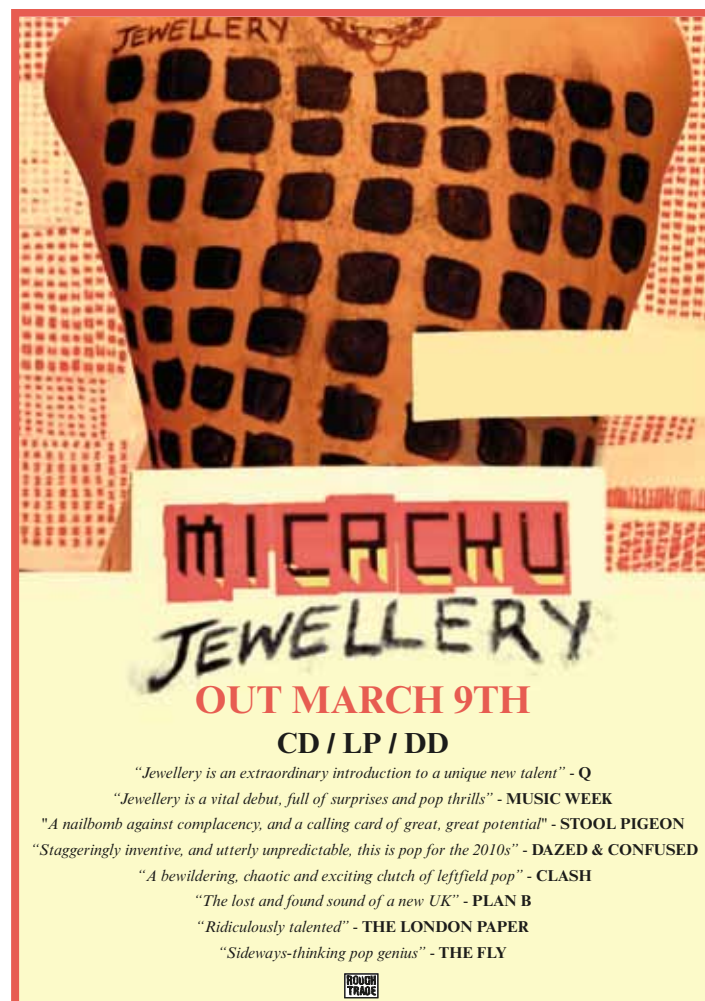
Ned Raggett

Zu

Carboniferous (Ipecac)

This is when Italian jazz-metallers Zu finally become genuine contenders. Refining their art for a decade, the saxophone-led mentalism has rarely dipped below arresting, evoking John Zorn downing handfuls of downers; now, the trio are approaching essential. *Carboniferous* grinds its way through 10 monumental seams of primordial rock, pausing only to pick up label boss Mike Patton en route to bless 'Soullympics' with typically atmospheric gurgles. His contribution is a comparative distraction (although, if it adds an extra few hundred sales then it has to be said, job fucking done), for the real heat arrives when interplay between the sax, face-smacking bass and epileptic drums coalesces into a mesmerising, unstoppable force. Because when Zu hit a head of steam with ferociously heavy grooves, such as the cataclysmic 'Cthonian', they steamroller all that lies before them, leaving you choking dust and wondering how most of your record collection will sound interesting, inventive or intense ever again.

Adam Anonymous





Reissues

lazy gaze

Words: **Fiona Fletcher**

Illustration: **Gwénola Carrère**

While a good compilation can encapsulate, a haphazard one can desecrate. *Plan B* urges you to follow your heart, not history

Various

Sci Fi Lo Fi Volume III: Shoegazing 1985-2009 (Soma)

Oliver Sacks writes in *Musicophilia* that musical memory is separate from both procedural and episodic memory. It is known that people with conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's can still recall and respond to familiar music. From the first strum of The Jesus And Mary Chain's fractured fuzz guitar to the chiming harmonics of Lush, I know that these songs – so familiar, and yet so fresh – are archived at the deepest level of my memory, in a place where the ravages of time will never touch them; the first nine tracks provide a snapshot of the scene when I was on the cusp of adolescence and adulthood.

Shoegazing was initially a term of contempt, referring to floppy-fringed boys and girls too intent

words, it's to seriously miss the point. This music is about texture, harmonics – it's not the grammar, it's the feeling – and the phase-shifting of Chapterhouse's three guitars on 'Pearl', one chiming and crystalline, another acoustic, drenched in backwards reverb, and a third: deep, fuzzed-out, skittering like "rave music with Rickenbackers", as the contemporary press had it.

Yet after even a casual listen to this collection, put together by Radio One DJ Rob Da Bank, you notice omissions. There's a void exactly the size and shape of My Bloody Valentine. How do you document a scene without the band whose inescapable shadow forms the biggest connection between these artists? The album dips on the recent stuff, focusing on the electronic end of nu-gaze. Perhaps this is inevitable, as *Sci Fi Lo Fi* comes from a dance label – yet, in that case, where are the Nineties bands that flirted with dance, Curve and Seefeel? And the compilation acts as though shoegaze vanished between 1994 and 2004, ignoring thriving American mutations of the genre.

My other problem with nu-gaze is the insistence upon using Ulrich Schnauss as the go-to-guy for vaguely dancey remixes. If I want disco anthems made with atmospheric goth-rock schlock, I'll listen to Justice. If I want my face melted off with blissful feedback, I'll choose Asobi Seksu or Manhattan Love Suicides (two other notable omissions). Schnauss somehow manages to combine the worst aspects of both genres – not to mention the fact that he couldn't find a bangin' beat if Erol Alkan shoved him up the arse with one. But most disappointing is the slight whiff of plagiarism here – sure, for a historical scene, there are only a limited handful of classics to be had in the first place. But too much of the contextual music is taken, tune for tune, from the setlist that Nathaniel Cramp (of London shoegaze club Sonic Cathedral) DJ'd on, funnily enough, Rob Da Bank's Radio One show. Maybe when Cramp releases a comp then we'll have a more definitive – and complete – documentation of the genre.

It's not the grammar, it's the feeling

upon their banks of effects pedals to notice the audience. But the best of this music gazed ecstatically upward, marrying the ethereal beauty of Cocteau Twins to the discordant noise of Sonic Youth. It was derided as sexless, but it transcended gender in the choirboy vocals of Ride and Pale Saints, the boy-girl harmonies of Slowdive. Sure, it inspired hyperbole – the journalistic cliché 'Cathedral of Sound' was coined at a Lush gig – but there are moments (the bass-runs on Pale Saints' 'Sight Of You', the rhythmic brass stabs of Spiritualized's 'If I Were With Her Now', the drums finally kicking in on Slowdive's 'When The Sun Hits') when it's perfect.

To enunciate a common complaint – that the sound is muffled, that it lacks bass response – is like complaining that Terry Riley lacks tunes; in other



clairvoyant noise

Words: **George Taylor**

Illustration: **Matthew the Horse**

Godflesh

Songs Of Love And Hate (Earache)

Songs Of Love And Hate In Dub (Earache)

William Burroughs, talking of his and Brion Gysin's famous cut-up technique, claimed that when you cut into the present, the future leaks out – a divination rite, if you like, for one who believes in predetermination. Is it possible that, as Godflesh's Justin K Broadrick deconstructed the songs from his 1996 album *Songs Of Love And Hate* in order to rework them for the following year's *Love And Hate In Dub*, he glimpsed what was to come about because of his influence? At the time of the original's release, Broadrick's crushingly heavy industrial metal had already been essentially ripped off and commercialised by US bands such as Fear Factory and Korn, bands who then became the blueprint for much of the aimless, juvenile aggression that made the metal landscape at the turn of the century such an unsavoury terrain to traverse.

Early Godflesh, such as debut album *Streetcleaner* and 1991's 'Cold World' EP, pulled off a rare trick by explicitly exposing their influences (Killing Joke, PiL, Coil's *Scatology*) while simultaneously sounding entirely unique. They followed the bruised, bruising examples of Swans' journeys into relentlessness – swapping the NY band's subject fetish of the influence of sexual repression upon authority for iconoclastic rants

When you cut into the present, the future leaks out

against the backbreaking industries (work and religion) of working-class Birmingham. They were a band more cited than sold.

So, in a mistake likely influenced less by creative than commercial reasons, Broadrick replaced the hard, programmed drum machine blasts of his previous three albums with the accessible grooves of a live drummer, and Godflesh's music took itself out of the realm of extreme music theory/exploration and realigned itself with the younger, overtly

masculine happenings of the baggy shorts brigade, which soon developed into what could then and now only be called (shudder) 'rap metal'. If it's not for certain that Broadrick, a highly conscious artist, foresaw all of this, what is certain is that the release of *Songs Of Love And Hate* – since described by its maker as sounding 'flat' – was followed by a nervous breakdown, the slow dissolution of the band and a heavy shift in musical direction towards the more serene, almost pop plateau of his Jesu project. This isn't to say that *Songs Of Love And Hate* fails as a record, for there is undeniable power here. It's just a case of being able to find it (at the risk of stating the obvious). The locked-down sludge riffage of 'Fail' and the rising pile of howling bile that is 'Circle Of Shit' provide bewildering moments; moments where you're reminded of just how valuable Broadrick is to extreme music.

However, it's on the accompanying remix album *Love And Hate In Dub* where these songs are given real focus. Made up mostly of agonisingly raw bass and drums – shuddering foundations for little else other than guitar scree, piercing drones and Broadrick's raspy, close-throated roaring – it's brilliant in its entirety.

Beastie Boys

Paul's Boutique (EMI)

Now, it is in no way intended to disparage the nation of Switzerland when we suggest that the extracurricular two or three years of the Beastie Boys' career prior to this release, in the summer of 1989, are somewhat summed up by the fact that opening track 'To All The Girls' finds space to deliver props to "the Swiss girls". After *Licence To Ill* landed in 1987, the trio probably had even more fun than that album's lyrics indicated, but the notion that it might be long-lasting was not universal.

Few, on the other hand, would have expected the then-nascent Dust Brothers

to weigh in as producers and sweat enough blood over the whole process to end up with a would-be landmark of sample-based music. Betcha that even they didn't expect to sample The Sweet, either.

So here we are: *Paul's Boutique* is now 20 years old, remastered and snottily literate rather than just snotty. It comes with no extra tracks or anything like that (although there is a track-by-track commentary by the band explaining how they made the record), but hey, it namechecks ecstasy and mobile phones, has almost no wasted space and is pretty much a classic inside or outside of its self-created sphere.

Noel Gardner

Captain Beefheart And The Magic Band

Safe As Milk (Rev-Ola)

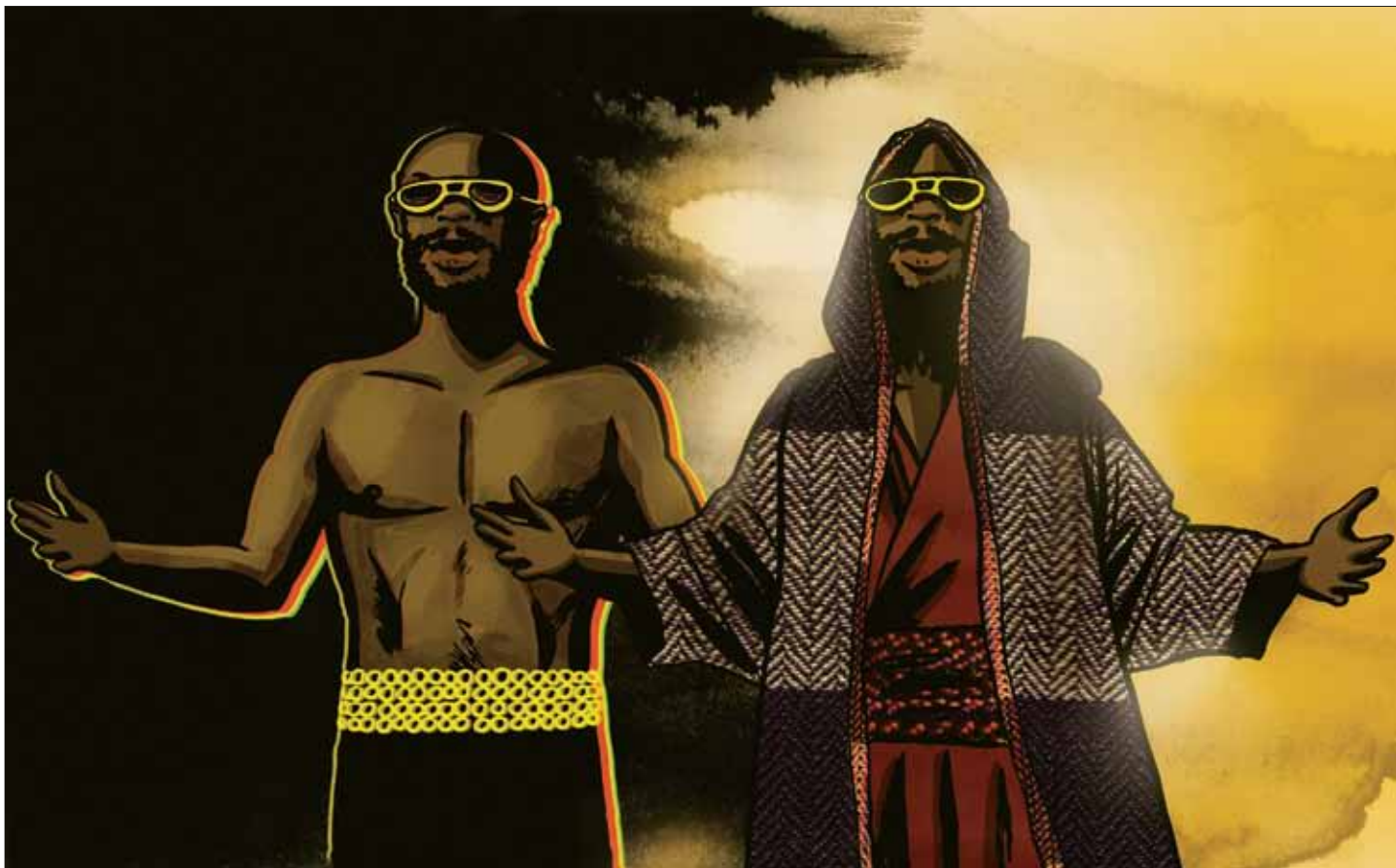
In September 1967, no doubt, Beefheart's first proper studio album would have sounded pretty deranged. Indeed, the record was not hugely successful upon its initial release. In retrospect, however – and compared, for instance, to their notorious *Trout Mask Replica*, released two years later – it seems positively tame, but, one could argue, no less brilliant for that.

Among the pop, doo-wop and soul influences evident on *Safe As Milk* are planted more than a few seeds for the deconstructed blues to come; the beats,

likewise, are already heading towards the gloriously fucked-up. There's also less of the zany humour which some would find off-putting in the Captain's subsequent work. Tracks like 'Electricity' and 'Abba Zaba' strike a particularly strong balance between the experimental and the (relatively) conventional, aided by an impressive line-up including Ry Cooder, then just 20 years old, on guitar.

This reissue also contains tracks from the unfinished *It Comes To You In A Plain Brown Wrapper*, recorded just half a year later but already finding Van Vliet a step further down his singularly warped path.

Marcus O'Dair



for i have sinned

Words: Neil Kulkarni

Illustration: John Cei Douglas

Isaac Hayes

Black Moses (Concord/Stax)

Juicy Fruit (Disco Freak) (Concord/Stax)

Numb yrself, 'cos in pop-historical terms, the deaths are coming thick and fast: everyone keen to pay tribute where they can, attendant labels getting on with the random repackaging and remastering of the texts (witness Universal's hapless slinging out of the forgettable *Juicy Fruit* alongside *Black Moses* here – ignore the former, get the latter and then move on to *Hot Buttered Soul* and *To Be Continued*). But fuck obituaries, the line of mourners, the showing your face, the piling up of learned comment into the dead-end of legacy. Words fail me when artists like Hayes die, not because of the lineage but 'cos of the friendship, the intimacy lost.

The man christened 'Black Moses' by a bouncer, the man whose chain-clad performances seemed to be mystical, poetical and political acts of liberation and catharsis, was also a man who let you into his labyrinth, a man who had seemingly explored your own inner space, a sculptor and visionary of sound that prophesied everyone from Pete Rock and The Bomb Squad through to Dre and Dilla, a man who did for soul and R&B what Copernicus and Galileo did

for the cosmos, what De Gama and Polo did for the known world. As wracked, ravished listener, your relationship with the man is as fellow explorer of his genius, riding shotgun on his mission into his own maelstrom.

On *Black Moses*, the break-up album he wrote while his marriage was disintegrating in 1971, Hayes inhabits you with sound, gets into your pulse, tunes your heartrate to his heartache. Opening up the sacrosanct – Bacharach's holiest hits – knowing that the sky is no limit but the ribcage is, Hayes unfolds his soul slowly over the 14 tracks here, slips

Always a step away from despair

you the direct and the diffuse, the journey sometimes too gorgeous to bear (the opening duo of 'Never Can Say Goodbye' and 'Close To You' are less songs to hear than planets whose orbits you fall into). The band is way too funky to ignore, the playing and arrangement hitting stellar space and liquid wonder too often for this to be accident; the cumulative detonation for the senses drains both singer and listener into a contemplative afterglow always a step away from despair. Hayes on the mic, sobbing, holding it together, sinking into the molten insolubility of loneliness – the lines you know and the melodies you thought your heart

was tired of are opened up surgically, reconfigured and imagined fresh, dread and torment smeared across the oceanic vistas that reveal themselves.

Hayes makes you listen to these standards again, find their uneasy heart again, takes the solid foundations of the Stax sound and makes every second count in a new way, in a suggestive and at times ethereal arrangement of Memphis grit that gives every close-up of himself a deep-focus depth, a steadicam's sure eye. It puts you in an entirely new place as a listener. You're not merely a dazzled spectator, let alone there to admire the craft – you're there *with* him, and, after a while, you realise you've become a presence within the space of these songs, free to wander the reanimated edens of life and decay conjured therein. Unsurprising, then, that when this whirlpool first hit the racks the mainstream rock press derided it as black muzak, easy-listening soul, castigated it for its over-slickness, fearful of Stax busting out of the shackles of its tinsnack past and daring to dream up such cavernous basilicas to the self and the lover. But 'muzak' implies your ability to turn off, to coast, to forget what you're hearing. Hayes offers you no such relief, and *Black Moses*, as sonic vision, as lover's testament, as spiralling self-pilgrimage, is still a visitation from heaven and hell.

Bless your brokenness, because here be redemption. Be touched again.

Casiotone For The Painfully Alone

Advance Base Battery Life (Tomlab)

Look! Fifteen orphans, singles and covers and compilation tracks, buzzin' and getting on splendidly. This is a party mix, in the most democratic sense. For you, white-eyed girl grinding up embarrassingly against god-knows-who: a slick, bashful, tongue-in-cheek rendition of Missy Elliott's

'Hot Boyz'. Hey, you! The one kid who can actually dance: hang your puppet-joints from the breakbeats of 'Old Panda Days' (featuring No Kids' Nick Krgovich) and 'White Corolla'. Sad, gin-wielding puppy on the hallway carpet: take 'Lesley Gore On The TAMI Show', the new version, with that glorious chick Jenny Herbinson's timid, pennywhistle voice. Hiccup once, burst into tears. Good job. And all together now, for the

judder and the vast, embracing hum of Casiotone's 'Graceland', the most plainly ass-kicking cover I've heard in years ('Born In The USA' might have won, if main-man Owen Ashworth hadn't kinda vocodered its rapturous chorus into submission. No matter). Goin' to Graceland, all of us, armed with this strange, post-futuristic sound of our generation's youth. Do we look lonely?

Meryl Trussler

Death

... For The Whole World To See (Drag City)

Are Death the greatest band you've never heard? Unless you're currently teasing your hair into a Wayne Kramer frizz, the answer's no. Yet, although it's taken 35 years for brothers Bobby, David and Dannis Hackney's debut album to emerge – record label execs pulled the plug when the

trio refused to change their name to something less morbid – there's more to these seven songs than the missing sliver of proto-punk history they represent.

Bobby and Dannis later moved to Vermont to become reggae duo Lambsbread, but as African-Americans raised in riot-torn Detroit, Death threw themselves wholeheartedly into the MC5/Stooges template of blazing guitar lines and rallying polemic. 'Keep On Knocking' dispenses the former with ample sinew and snottiness, while 'Politicians In My Eyes' overcomes its clunky lyrics with looming apocalyptic dread. One ill-advised foray ('Let The World Turn') into stilted psychedelia aside, this is one exhumation that smells surprisingly fresh.

Abi Bliss

David Dondero

South Of The South (Affairs Of The Heart)

David Dondero is a songwriter oft cited by other songwriters: what Conor Oberst made famous with his early Bright Eyes work – a kind of precise, wry and symbolic way with words, sung in a warble as fragile as burned bracken – Dondero had, arguably, been doing already (and, even more arguably, better). Yet, he has largely gone unnoticed on a grand scale, and you'd be forgiven for claiming that there's often a tang of injustice to be detected in his sharp delivery, in his lemon-acid consonants (his vocals are warped and wrinkled but adamant, rebellious).

This is his sixth album, originally released on Oberst's Team Love label in 2005 but now repossessed and issued through Affairs Of The Heart; it's brawnier than follow-up *Simple Love*, but no less vivid: "I was just a tender chicken in the Florida rotisserie", he begins, trussed up and impaled on a self-made spit, "my own sweats basting me, thunderstorms chasing me". What sounds, at first, to be a feverish delusion is just an honest portrait of frustration and lost love – and while Dondero sometimes too easily portrays himself as victim, wounded and wallowing, he's pretty much just a man born at the wrong point in history: "There was a Cuban district and a centre for the arts", he pines, visiting some now-generic cityscape, "It's now a mall-like atmosphere, homogenous and insincere – they burned its heart right out". We flinch with familiarity.

Lauren Strain

Enchantment

Dance The Marble Naked (Peaceville)

Enchantment's debut was intended as Century Media's answer to Peaceville's three big Northern death/doom bands (Anathema, My Dying Bride, and Paradise Lost), but this Blackpool quintet imploded after this, their first recording, never to be heard of again.

Now reissued on the spiritual home of death/doom, *Dance The Marble Naked* is very similar to the early output of the big three, with mournful melodic passages building to brutal, Bolt Thrower-style chugging. Paul Jones' vocals have never endeared themselves to listeners; he attempts notes through a diaphragm-shaking metal growl. The effect, even on those hardened to the pig squeals and gurgling of extreme metal, can seem comic.

But there is a certain aesthetic symmetry to be witnessed between the brutish, ineloquent vocals and the lovelorn romanticism of the lyrics. That might sound naff, but if you are listening to an album called *Dance The Marble Naked* you must have already suspended disbelief.

Patrick Moran

Loren Connors and Jim

O'Rourke

Two Nice Catholic Boys (Family Vineyard)

Faced with the prospect of two maverick American guitarists paired in a duel, one brings to mind the image of that old Vivienne Westwood print picturing a couple of gunslingers waving their dongos about in front of each other. Or is that just me?

Mercifully, mutual masturbation is not on the agenda for this selection of recordings from Connors and O'Rourke's 1997 European tour. The three improvisations here find the two players curling and snaking around each other, creating delicate and sinewy guitar patterns which slowly reach a scorching level of thrashed-out intensity. The opening minutes of 'Maybe Paris' are evocative of deserts in the midst of burning heat. Things slowly ebb away, leaving dark abstractions beneath a smouldering red sky.

These two nice boys conjure *real* American music, redolent of vast open landscapes where raw elements carve great wonders from thin air.

Euan Andrews

Beth Orton

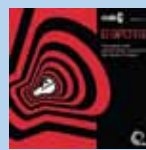
Trailer Park (Sony)

Back when I was 15 and in love with Ryan Adams, everyone told me to listen to Beth Orton – his rumoured on/off girlfriend at the time – instead. Well, here we are, seven years since I was 15 and 13 years since the original release of *Trailer Park*; dude's getting married to Mandy Moore, and I'm in my attic spooning up strawberries and finally getting around to it.

Produced by Andrew Weatherall, *Trailer Park* is more of a painkiller haze than I was expecting: 'Tangent' drifts on a numb bass, tranced and haunted, boating out on a muffled electric whine as its eight minutes time out; 'She Cries Your Name', recorded with William Orbit, is a clarion of protesting strings treated and weirded-up to sound like they're being fed through glass wire. 'Touch Me With Your Love' is a similarly spooked reel of stills and pauses, artificial percussion twitching and scrapping at wounds beneath an almost dubby, bumpy bass and Orton's spoken word. It would seem that Dido totally ripped the hell off of this stuff, turned it into nuked schmaltz and won a load of meaningless awards for it (while *Trailer Park*-era Orton was nominated for, not the winner of, two Brits), but here are the seedlings, the sediments of something far superior.

For the benefit of both Orton newbies and stalwarts is a second disc of B-sides and rarities. In a patch of new, white light on a sticky, tarmac floor, blanche out to this.

Lauren Strain



Various

G-Spots: The Spacey Folk Electro-Horror Sounds Of The Studio G Library (Trunk)

Biscuits and tits. Isn't that what Trunk Records is all about? Well, not entirely, although they are both rather wonderful things. With the recent issues of Basil Kirchin and John

Baker in particular, Trunk have shown that there is a seed of seriousness buried amid the nostalgia and cheeky chappy rhetoric. At first glimpse, this compilation of cues from John Gale's Studio G music library might appear to be a further expression of frivolity. Listen to the damn thing, however, and it becomes clear that Studio G produced some of the most gripping, experimental library music known to humankind; electronically enhanced, erring towards the dark side and highly inventive. One of the most compelling aspects of library music must surely be its facelessness, its Auton-like plastic nature; however, determined to invest the music with a contemporary edge, Gale encouraged his composers to try new methods and devices such as tape looping, echo units and synths, resulting in a heady blend of white hot innovation, teatime cosiness and disquieting eeriness. The album's 26 cues were mastered by Jon Brooks, aka Ghost Box's The Advisory Circle – a good indication of what to expect.

Joseph Stannard

Rush

Retrospective III: 1989-2008 (Anthem/Atlantic)

Hey, aren't Rush fascists? Probably not, considering Geddy Lee is Jewish. But aren't they fans of Ayn Rand? Yeah, but so is my best friend. Are you calling my best friend a fascist? Because if so, I will kill you. Even if you're right. Rush are one of those huge bands who are resolutely non-canonical, left out of orthodox rock history because they just don't fit. They're Canadian, they speak for the genuine geeks – not the cool ones you hang out with now, but the kids who couldn't even find anyone to play *Dungeons And Dragons* with them – and following their Seventies peak they never became completely shit. Rush sound as though their journey may be ongoing rather than a re-run.

Selected from the band's last 20 years on Atlantic, this compilation features some fantastic music, not least late-period peaks 'Dreamline', 'Presto' and 'Far Cry', but there are some obvious omissions – the proto-mathrock of 'Show Don't Tell' is missing, for example, and where's 'Spindrift'? Tsk. But hey, it's Rush. You can forgive your favourite uncles anything, right?

Joseph Stannard

Six Organs Of Admittance

RTZ (Drag City)

RTZ collects early recordings by the mercurial Ben Chasny. Those familiar with his work will know that it can veer between the viscerally unforgiving and the spiritual and profound from record to record. Here, that transition can occur from song to song.

The second disc contains album *Nightly Trembling*, previously restricted to a release of only 33 copies in 1999. Recorded on four-track, the songs blend rhythmic chanting with serene fingerpicking and metallic growls. You can almost hear the tape buckling beneath the pressure. RTZ also boasts tracks previously released on splits with Charalambides and Vibracathedral Orchestra, the music suitably dense and meditative. Never for the fainthearted, Chasny's epic pieces are sometimes almost impenetrably oblique. Yet persevere, and you'll find beauty in the shadows, Loren Connors-esque riffs permeating the layers of noise. Six Organs Of Admittance is never anything other than engaging; brave, dark music that stares straight into the night.

Sam Lewis

Ultravox

Monument (EMI) Quartet (EMI)

In the videos from Ultravox's live shows circa 1982-1984, the band, at the height of their success, stand upon a gigantic stage behind boxy synths. This is where the difference between the electronic pop bands of the Eighties and the rock groups that preceded them becomes clear: what rock bands perform on stage is the *spectacle* of work. Like Stalinist factory workers, they operate instruments with skill in a group to produce a synchronised effect. Ultravox don't work, they simply *are*. They press keys and look straight at the audience; they become a human sculpture, reflecting the unlaboured passivity of the audience.

This is why Eighties synth-pop had such a monumental edge, carving a simple yet epic sound like a minimalist block around which spectators could have a theatrical experience. Listening to the remastered *Monument*, a live recording of their 1983 tour, is not about trying to identify differences from studio versions, extended guitar solos or mistakes. The music makes more sense as architecture to be inhabited than as a live experience to be relived. *Monument* and *Quartet* contain all of the contradictions that made synth-pop what it was: manly dandyism, euphoric alienation and arty populism.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

The Undertones

The Undertones (Union Square)

Marking 30 years since its initial release, this reissue of the band's debut is a treat. 'Jump Boys', 'Here Comes The Summer' and 'Billy's Third' still display that original vitality and effervescence, straddling the tri-decade gap splendidly. Where this reissue becomes essential is in the clutch of 17 bonus tracks, comprising early singles, B-sides and Peel sessions. From 'Teenage Kicks' and 'True Confessions' to 'You've Got My Number (Why Don't You Use It)' and the jaunty, daft 'Mars Bars', Feargal Sharkey is in fine, optimistic voice, giving life to those who dismiss(ed) punk as a hard-nosed political movement in the latter years of the Seventies.

If that weren't enough, the included 'Teenage Kicks' promo video is glorious: innocent and still utterly fresh pop.

Joe Shooman



returning the screw

Words: **Hannah Gregory**

Photography: **L Careme**

Author and filmmaker **Virginie Despentes** rewrites feminism in memoir-cum-manifesto *King Kong Theory*

"I am writing as an ugly one for the ugly ones", writes Virginie Despentes, French author and director of *Baise-Moi* – the 2002 film that provoked tags from 'rape-revenge' to 'psycho-trash', and was widely censored outside Britain upon release. You might read the opening lines to her latest text, her memoir turned feminist crit-lit of *King Kong Theory*, as Rallying Angry Woman-speak. But Despentes – one time rock critic, one time hooker, one time rape victim, in inverse order – constructs an argument heavy-weighted and punk in spirit. Lydia Lunch helped with the translation. "It was a strange experience to have Lydia reading the book aloud in my kitchen," she says.

It's alarming when Despentes proclaims she worked as a prostitute as though this were a liberating choice ("Being a whore was often great – the desire was gratifying," she writes) but as her personal experiences are exposed, she challenges and cajoles, citing from the feminist archives of Simone de Beauvoir and Gail Pheterson, to cut into preconceptions in a purposefully problematic manifesto. Here's a short, fast introduction as to how she employs shock tactics to rupture silence.

You speak about punk rock as something liberating, to help with your experiences...

"Definitely. I feel that that was where my education was. It's useful to break things down, to decode lots of things in mainstream culture. When I write, I try to in a punk style. Not so much to do with the anger of the music, but with a love for Bukowski, Dashiell Hammett, and Hubert Selby Jr. Sometimes there is a fine line between brilliance and stupidity in this kind of writing."

In Britain there is the impression that French cinema is more risqué, yet the way *Baise-Moi* was censored in France would seem to go against this idea. Do you feel this was about censoring people's bodies and voices, as much as the visual document itself?

"There is a strong tension in France between tradition and innovation. France in the Eighties and Nineties was the best country in which for women to make cinema. Now, women are the first to suffer from not being able to find money. It was a censorship of me and Coralie [Trinh Thi, co-director] and our decision to make a film with two porn actresses. We were outcasts from the industry. We were not supposed to speak. They, the educated, spoke about us, but we were not allowed to speak of the film ourselves."

'We were not supposed to speak. They, the educated, spoke about us'

The most powerful thing about *King Kong Theory* is the direct and uncensored view onto your experiences with rape and prostitution. These are words that people shy from directly articulating. Do you write against such silence?

"Sexuality is not dirty. Providing someone with company is not dirty. It feels dirty only because it is forbidden. Why should people be prosecuted for

supplying what people want – be it sex or drugs? We achieve nothing in criminalising these women. It is not for their sakes the law makes prostitution illegal. The issue is the perceived image of the sexually active woman, and the image of the family – the 'correct' option. I partly wrote *King Kong Theory* in response to how I saw my 12-year-old stepdaughter exposed to so many sexualised images in everyday life, and so little feminism.

"What strikes me about prostitution is that you never see demonstrations where prostitutes ask for prostitution to be banned – but for it to be legalised, so that they might have rights, and improved working conditions. Conditions in France since the clean-up a few years ago, which stopped prostitutes from working in the centre of cities, are really terrible. Girls have to operate outside the city, in woods, like animals. It's inhumane. They don't have any right to complain to the police, even if they are assaulted. They cannot ask anything of the law, because they themselves are illegal."

There is the opinion that feminism is no longer relevant – but the issues persist.

"When I said I was going to write this text about feminism, my friends advised me against it. They said, "Try to make it funny, we don't want to read feminism anymore". With the book's release, I was surprised that people actually want to talk about feminism again, because it has been off the radar for so long. Even if people disagreed with my ideas, some enjoyed being able to talk about such subjects. [Other] people seem to think that women have made enough noise."

King Kong Theory is out now on Serpent's Tail

books

**Money Will Ruin Everything 2
(Rune Grammofon)**

In Jazzaway, Jazzland, and Smalltown Superjazz, to name but three, Norway's ludicrously prolific jazz and improv scene finds reliable (and frequently brilliant) homegrown outlets. Yet no label can quite touch Rune Grammofon, either for size and consistency of roster or for aesthetic coherence – despite the fact that their remit has always included electronica and rock as well as leftfield jazz.

This lavishly produced hardback book, published to celebrate the label's 10th birthday, comes replete with essays from *Wire*'s editor-at-large Rob Young, *Rolling Stone*'s senior editor David Fricke, and even a note of support from Rough Trade's Geoff Travis. It's this last that is perhaps most significant. Though the two interviews with the genial Rune Kristoffersen reveal that he used to work for the notoriously immaculate jazz/classical label ECM, they also point to a clear post-punk ethos in the label he went on to found (those same interviews mention Factory, 4AD and Mute as reference points, alongside Mo Wax and Warp).

The majority of the book's 152 pages, however, are given over to Kim Hiorthøy's sleeve art, so intrinsic to the label that the third and final essay is by design writer Adrian Shaughnessy. Shaughnessy may be pushing it to suggest that these sleeves could be one day regarded in the same light as classic covers from Blue Note or ECM, but the sentiment is spot-on. Without a doubt, Hiorthøy's artwork has played a key part in pushing Rune Grammofon into the territory of a bona fide classic indie.

Ultimately, however, it's the 25 exclusive tracks on the two accompanying CDs that elevate *Money Will Ruin Everything 2* above mere coffee-table book for those of impeccably perverse musical taste. Inevitably, some acts are missing, such as the two-man sonic clusterfuck of MoHa!, subject of a recent *Plan B* In Praxis feature; of those who do feature, some, such as Deathprod, perhaps don't work as well outside full album context.

These are mere niggles, however, more than compensated for by devastating tracks by Ultralyd and N-ensemble, Food/Nils Petter Molvær, Arve Henriksen, and Supersilent, to name but a few personal favourites. Shining, Scorch Trio and Box tracks notwithstanding, it's worth noting that it's the more reflective side of Rune Grammofon that's foregrounded here. But it's still a thoroughly fitting celebration of a musical headquarters that deserves to be ranked among the most important of our era.

Marcus O'Dair

silver rain

Words: **Jon Falcone**

**Personal relationships and
paranormal energies collide in the
comic books of Terry Moore**

I first came across the comics of Terry Moore when I was visiting friends in Stockholm. To save on hotel costs, I was flat-sitting for people I had never met. Their flat was wonderful. There was no television but there was a huge shelf of comic compendiums, all of the same series: Moore's *Strangers In Paradise*. *Strangers In Paradise* was warm like a *Friends* marathon, but twisted, like David Cronenberg was writing the punchlines. Centred around the story of Katchoo and Francine, two women who tumble into each other's lives as late teens, a large bulk of the narrative revolves around them trying to figure out what they want from one another, when they're not fighting the mob or battling government corruption.

I wasn't able to finish the series during my stay, but I'm working my way through the compendiums one Christmas and birthday at a time. Now, though, Moore has a new project. Titled *Echo*, it again follows female protagonists, striving for stability and struggling to deal with the everyday, even as their lives turn absurd. "In *Echo*, I wanted to revisit classic sci-fi," explains Moore. "The type of story they wrote when atomic science was the door to tomorrow and anything was possible in the new

NASA age." In the first issue, a photographer, Julie Martin, witnesses an explosion in the sky and is covered in pellets of a mystery metal – a metal that we find out is an experimental beta fight suit with nuclear properties. This sets the premise for a complex, multi-layered drama that snakes

between realism and fantasy, magnetic forces and nuclear energy, with the military in hot pursuit.

Moore, unusually amongst male comic book writers, writes women with finesse. "I do it without fear of responsibility and without awareness of what I'm doing, really," he explains.

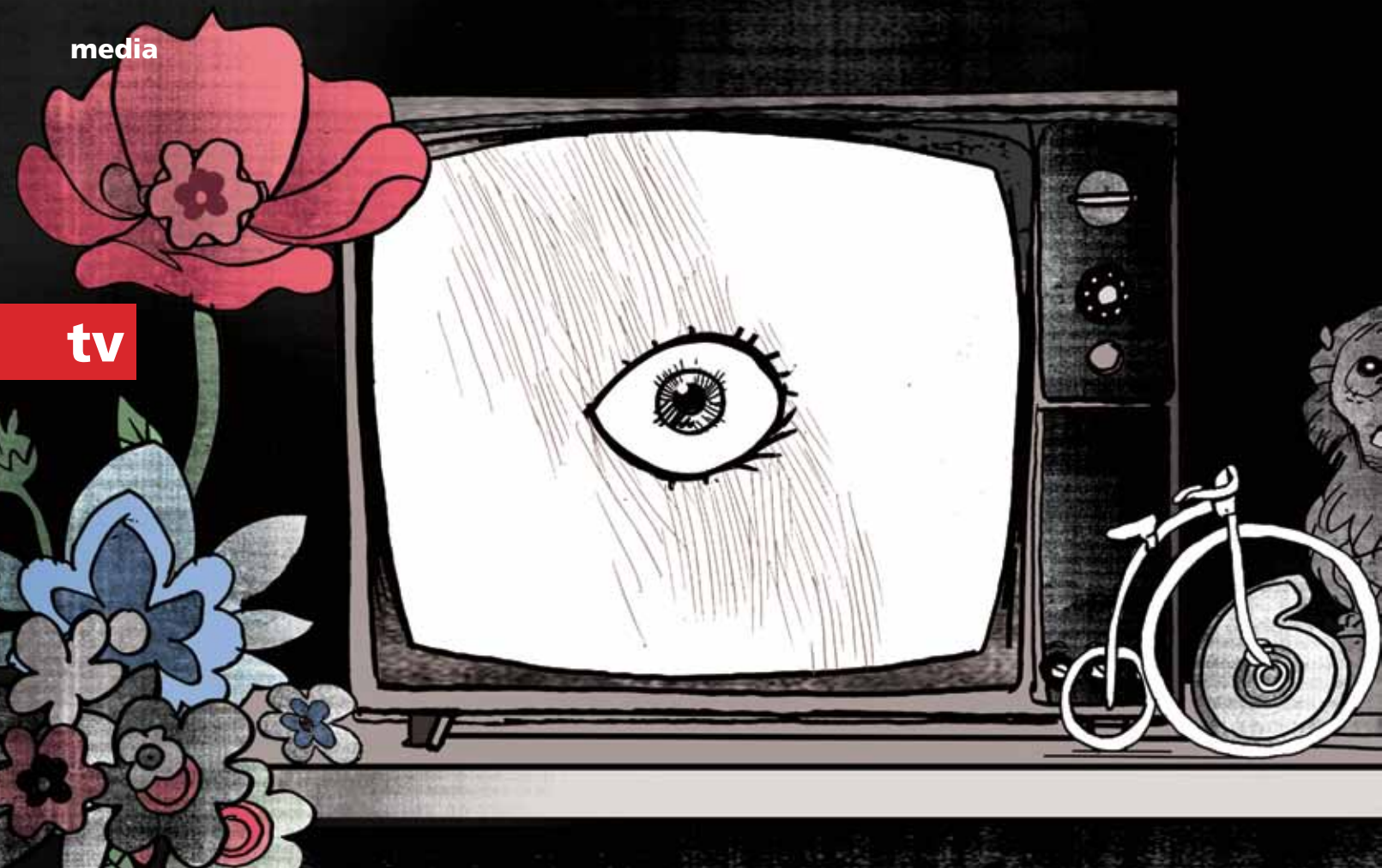
"I just write people. Women are prominent in my stories because I'm very interested in them and what they are going through in this life. Later, when we step back and look at my finished work and people start wanting my credentials for such an undertaking, I'm not sure how to defend myself. But I keep doing what I do because

**'I try to write honest
relationships between
ordinary people
leading extraordinary
lives'**

I can't help it. It's what I do."

Strangers In Paradise and *Echo* are stories with tender narratives, but told in hard lines. Moore's frames share the action-comic and tones colours of the work of, say, Alan Moore and Frank Miller. Yet his characters are softer, more approachable, and engaging on a personal level. This is a world where the fantastic happens, but also a world where people have to deal with the fallout. "I try to write honest relationships between ordinary people leading extraordinary lives," he explains. "That's how I see it."





escaping the colony

Words: **Joseph Stannard**

Illustration: **Elliott Elam**

Remembering Patrick McGoohan, captive soul at the heart of cult show *The Prisoner*

When British actor Patrick McGoohan died on 13 January of this year, aged 80, it was more than just the tragic loss of a fondly remembered icon of TV and film; it was a reminder that his kind come along with all too little frequency, and that there is no-one on Earth who could possibly take his place.

McGoohan leaves behind not a tedious legacy of uninterrupted brilliance – “I’ve done an awful lot of crap,” he once admitted, and *Ice Station Zebra* or *Braveheart* are unlikely to be

remembered with any great fondness, though his performances in *All Night Long* and *Scanners* are excellent – but something far more interesting. That is, a piece of art that forced open the parameters of its medium and which remains a staggering achievement over 40 years since its initial appearance.

Unfolding over 17 episodes during late 1967 and early 1968, *The Prisoner* was born out of McGoohan’s boredom with his role as Bond-esque super-spy John Drake in Incorporated Television Company Ltd’s popular espionage series *Danger Man* (*Secret Agent Man* in the US), his opinion that the human race was developing too quickly and mechanically for its own good, and his infatuation with a Italianate resort village on the coast of Wales, a grand

folly named Portmeirion by its designer and architect, Sir Clough Williams-Ellis.

McGoohan convinced ITC managing director Lew Grade that he could produce a follow-up to *Danger Man* cheaply, and received an instant commission. Starring in the title role, McGoohan played a civil servant on the cusp of resignation who is abducted and imprisoned in detention-cum-holiday camp The Village. Each episode witnessed the repetition of a dual struggle, the authorities of The Village as determined to discover the reason for Number Six’s resignation as he is to escape their surveillance. His chief opponent was Number Two, a chairman figure invariably defeated by his captive’s superior intellect and rapidly replaced. Employing variations on the

same theme every week, *The Prisoner* owed debts to Kafka, Camus and Sartre that it paid back with interest, disseminating existential ideas within the framework

of televisual entertainment while boldly plundering genres such as science fiction, Western, political drama and action thriller.

But wait – as I’m lauding *The Prisoner*, I’m aware of the dangers attendant in attempting to preserve something so outlandishly great in the amber of hindsight. Surely to smugly assess its origins and blandly comment on its enduring influence is to drain its power, consign it to history? With any other TV series, that might be the case. But like its central character, the bullish, recalcitrant Number Six, *The Prisoner* resists being “pushed, filed, stamped, indexed...or numbered,” its brute singularity and obsessive perfection still shocking, still only graspable in part, still evidence of the undying will to rebel, against

authority, against life. *The Prisoner* relays a stark message from the individual to the universe; ‘I am alive, I am unique, and I will not be persuaded otherwise.’

The Prisoner is still alive and unique, partly due to a series of persistent audio-visual memes; McGoohan’s perpetually beetling brow; the immaculate design of The Village’s interiors; Rover, the growling, spherical guardian of The Village; Leo McKern as a furiously paternal Number Two (“You will not grow up to be a LONE WOLF!”); every frame of the audience-baiting final episode, ‘Fall Out’. To experience these now is to fly in the face of nostalgia, into the mouth of the moment. *The Prisoner* offers no comfort, only a jarring reminder that you exist, and yes, that matters.

2009 will see the long-mooted remake of McGoohan’s brainchild become a reality, appearing not as a feature-length film as first suggested, but an ITV/AMC television series. Jim Caviezel will play Number Six, with Sir Ian McKellen as Number Two. This invites a certain scepticism. *The Prisoner* is already so self-contained, so resonant, that there’s really no need for an update. Why erect a contemporary version of The Village, when the original has lost none of its glassy-eyed capacity for terror or its hall-of-mirrors relationship to society? Surely a large part of the series’ impact derived from its origins in the fierce imagination of one man, rather than the flip-chart fuckery of the focus group? And will the show really benefit from having its original Cold War backdrop replaced by the War On Terror? Then again, to entertain these reservations is to underestimate the power of McGoohan’s vision. Maybe the ideas that fuelled *The Prisoner* will prove durable enough to survive the inevitable attempts at unnecessary modernisation, and the psychic howl of indignation that resonated through the original series will remain as deafening as ever.

***The Prisoner* offers no comfort, only a jarring reminder that you exist, and yes, that matters**

building on barren earth

Words: Quintin Smith

Doom, famine, existential dread: video gaming gets a pallid makeover in this character-building string of titles from maverick Moscow development studio **Ice-Pick Lodge**

Russia isn't a country that lurches to mind when you think of videogames. Most people might have trouble imagining a Russian even playing *Guitar Hero*, let alone making it. But that's not really fair.

Visit Building 4, Flat 29, hidden down a side-street named First Novopodmoskovnyi in Moscow, and you'll find a fledgling games development studio called Ice-Pick Lodge that's stuck in the past in the absolute best way possible. The Ice-Pick Lodge team hark back to a time when masterpieces were coded by brave men in bedrooms, when no-one knew where gaming was going, and when your game not fitting into an existing genre was a *good* thing. Safe in the belly of their country and firm in their beliefs, Ice Pick has managed to avoid the terrible affliction that's struck down western Europe, America and Japan – game-making process becoming a strictly regulated business. Comparatively, Ice-Pick Lodge CEO Nikolay Dybowskiy is a desperate visionary. "The most important task," he says, "is to involve the *thinking* public in gaming and wait for the appearance of intelligent game journalism and criticism. As soon as the average level of intelligence of players and journalists rises, developers will respond immediately."

A brief overview of Ice-Pick's first game, *Pathologic*, should bring you up to speed. It begins with the player looking down at a stage as three 'actors' argue over which of their characters is best suited for the dilemma that is to come. After the scene ends the house lights go down and you're free to leave the theatre, at which point you're asked which of the three characters you want to take on the role of – the Haruspicus, the Bachelor or the Devotress.

What follows is an apocalyptic nightmare. Set in the early 20th century, your character arrives at a tiny Russian town on the day a terrible plague break out. Your job is to try to stop the disease before it wipes out the settlement, and depending on who you chose at the start you have to rely on either 'modern' medicine, traditional shamanic methods or unknowable messianic faith-healing. Achieving anything requires the run of the town, which means doing terrible favours for all sorts of power-mongers, rioters, drunks, drug-addicts, whores, liars, soldiers under orders to sterilise the town and one terrifying hanging judge, not to mention countless sad, sick and scared.

Utterly different, painfully difficult, relentlessly uncomfortable, reeking of low production values and (eventually) badly translated, *Pathologic* slipped onto the UK PC game review circuit in 2006 like an errant hypodermic needle into a plastic ball park. Nobody knew quite how to deal with it, and a recurring theme in the few publications that did review it was glowing body copy followed by a low score. As intrigued as the critics were they couldn't possibly advise anyone to actually spend money on this curio. *Plan B's* own Kieron Gillen summed it up neatly in his review for *PC Gamer*: "This will be someone's favourite game of the year. That somebody

almost certainly won't be you." *Pathologic* was far better received back in Russia where it won a score of game-of-the-year awards, but that doesn't make it any less of an aberration.

"Frankly, we never specifically aimed for being not-like-others," says Nikolay. "What we do began as an attempt at a cultural experiment. In 2002, we wrote a manifesto in which we proposed that the computer game is a new and independent form of art with huge and yet unexplored potential. "For us, it means primarily that games possesses a unique arsenal of specific 'tools' – ones that, unfortunately, we are yet to discover and master – that will allow this artistic form to become the language of the age we live in. We believe that the computer game could become art of the 21st Century, just like cinema became, to some extent, the primary form of art of the 20th century. Our studio was born as an artistic laboratory."

Ice-Pick's vision, then, is an expanded version of the bugbear that nags at a lot of adult gamers today – that the reason slow-burn, intelligent games are so rare (or to put it another way, the reason an adult rating on a game only ever means swearing and gore) is simply because the medium is so young. That makes Ice-Pick both an inspiration and martyrs, developers happy to dash themselves against unseen rocks. Nikolay sees it another way: "Dig the soil that the genius will plant seed into."

Ice-Pick are putting the finishing touches on the English version of their second PC game now. Known as *Typrop* ('Tension') in Russia, it's coming out here as *The Void* and is every bit as high-concept as anyone could have hoped for. You play the soul of someone who's just recently died, and first have to learn to survive in the strange purgatory you end up in. It's all about colour – the Void is a dark, barren place, and the little colour there is can be stolen away, kept in your body, and twisted into weird sigils that let you bend the world and its inhabitants to your will. It's the architecture of the place that's the most exciting part so far though – pointless, Escher-esque buildings, hostile black bluffs, stunning still lakes lit by organic-looking streetlamps. It's a beautiful place to explore.

The Void is a game about death, but Ice-Pick's reasoning for that goes way beyond death being a clear challenge staked out for the player. Wanting to build a better games industry has to start with building better gamers with higher expectations, something Nikolay refers to as 'catharsis'. "The metamorphose is a ritual event that assumes a 'small death' of the person that went through it. For a new, enlightened man to be born, the old one has to die."

Insanity in the most agreeable sense, I'm sure you'll agree. With any luck, *The Void* will get Ice-Pick a little more press, something which can only galvanise a team with such high ideals (or at least put a few more yankee dollars and English pounds into their pockets). Until then, anyone interested in picking up *Pathologic* for a song can find it at tinyurl.com/bu6v33

games



'The computer game is a new and independent form of art with huge and unexplored potential'



OK, so clearly you have memorised (at least) one piece of ridiculous hyperbole regarding yrself. Please quote your favourite here.

"Well, I do remember one thing – it's probably the only one I've memorised – I think it was when *Strange Weather* came out, and somebody said it was 'music to slit your wrists to'. I thought that was very unfair. Oh yes, and then somebody else once described me as 'The Sylvia Plath of Rock'n'Roll'. That was quite a good one, I thought."

What is biggest misconception about you, the most overused adjective?

"World-weary. Which makes me sound rather bored, and I'm not bored at all."

What was the most heinous lie you ever told in an interview?

"I really try not to lie in interviews. I've said a couple of stupid things in the past, about people and so on, which I've later regretted. Maybe because they were true."

Do you read your own press releases? Do you feel they represent you adequately?

"Yes, it's the professional thing to do. The thing is, my whole life I've been trying to bring together my life and my work, and I'm getting better at it now. I've always felt that it should be about the work, and not about the personality."

Has music criticism ever actually helped improve yr work, even only in spotting a mistake or providing a second opinion?

"Yes, I think so. Good music criticism – and it doesn't happen very often – can occasionally give you a handle on something you can't see otherwise because you're too close to the process."

If you were a music magazine editor, who would you feature and why? Who would you put on the cover?

"Amy Winehouse. I think she's tremendously talented. I like the others – I like Lily Allen and I love PJ Harvey very much – but I think Amy Winehouse has the best charisma. And the thing is, I really want her to pull through. I can relate to it, you know. And I think she will."

What do you do when a band you don't like cite you as an influence?

"I don't say anything. I just smile and say thank you."

Do you ever Google yourself? What's the best/worst/weirdest experience resulting from this?

"Do I ever what? Oh yes, of course I do. I was looking on YouTube and I found a duet with David Bowie, which I thought was fabulous. I don't really do computers so I have to get my manager to do it; someone showed me my Wikipedia entry the other day and I was very impressed. It's very long and very detailed, and quite nice, actually. As for Google results, I can't say I'm that fascinated. I thought we could all move beyond the point of slander, and I think we have."

What's the favourite of your record covers and why? What does it, y'know, say about you?

"Well, in *Broken English*, for example, I was looking away somewhere into the distance, and a few of my records have been like that. I think on these last two I'm looking straight

the true revenge of... Marianne Faithfull

Words: Jesse Darlin'

'Somebody said it was "music to slit your wrists to". I thought that was very unfair'



at the camera. I suppose for me it was a good way to get away from the feeling of just being looked at all the time."

What brilliant (at the time) ideas regarding 'direction' or presentation or whatever are you now glad you never followed?

"There was this nun in the Sixties who had a big hit with a record called 'Dominica'. It was like a novelty thing, you know? And I was asked to re-record that – *another* singing nun. I thought that was the most stupid idea that I'd ever heard, so I said no thank you, and I'm very glad I did."

Have you ever made a music video that actually expressed something about the band, or has it all been empty multi-media gimmickry and super-superficial posturing?

"I think I've always tried to make videos that were as true to myself as possible, but they weren't what they play on MTV. They weren't very sexually explicit; they weren't funny. And the great desire is to laugh at people, which I understand, but I never could manage to do it, to make oneself a cartoon. Or maybe I did it [with *Absolutely Fabulous* etc], but without ever really knowing how. At first I said, 'I won't play myself, I don't want to.' And then Jennifer said, 'OK...well, would you play God?' And I said, 'Oh, yes, all right then.' Rather grumpily. I didn't really have anything to say after that. But I did it and I loved doing it and eventually I got the joke."

Who was the worst (or weirdest) that ever supported you?

"Oh gee. Really, I had very good people. I don't have support, now, I don't like it. But I started my life on those big tours that had lots and lots of people on them. I think I was probably supporting them, but they were very good people, and I liked and respected them very much – The Hollies, Roy Orbison."

What's the most actually fairly insane thing a fan has done to impress you?

"I don't know. I've got a fan – I rather like her, you know? – who comes to all my shows all over the world. I was very, very surprised and quite touched, actually. I hope she didn't fuck herself up by going to Australia to see me. And it was nothing new, you know? I mean, she'd seen it a *lot*."

What's the worst question you've ever been asked? What was your answer?

"Oh God. Yes, it was when my book came out – in 1994 – and I can't really remember it, but they were sort of dreadful questions from Americans about Mick Jagger. And they were so vulgar, and I was quite shocked. As if I'd talk about it, like that. I think they were trying to get me to say how Mick Jagger was in bed, and I'm not going to talk about that. Unless it's in a positive way, of course. I said it was none of their business."



Nisennenmondai

plan b presents: smalltown supersound on fire

Words: **Euan Andrews**

Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

Sit tight and zone out as our Norwegian pals beam back audio postcards from alien ecosystems. It starts cool, but gets pretty toasty

Drivan

Som En Laederlapp

Before the partying kicks off, let's begin with a few short moments of quietness and ease from this new Kim Hiorthøy-led project. A girl sings, a guitar chimes soft and warm, there's a fuzzy shower of rusted horns and the briefest interlude of lazy beats. Give it time, and feel your heart as it begins to thaw.

Arp

From A Balcony Overlooking The Sea

And once the ice has melted, you should find yourself here in the cloudless idyll of Alexis Georgopoulos. Company is always better for these moments, of watching sky and sea melt together into the endless horizon, another green world beckoning.

Meanderthals

Kunst Or Ars

From out of the cooling night, soothing Balearic waters in which to bathe. Rune Lindbaek and the Idjut Boys conjure a sultry Fourth

World soundtrack

to the tropical beach party of your dreams, bodies softly swaying in the faint breeze. Why can't life actually be like these sounds?

Mungolian Jet Set Vs Mari Boine

It Ain't Necessarily Evil

It's time to rev it up a bit. Starting slowly at first, with slow and hesitant steps – but then the drums begin to work it, voices gather and swirl around you like beatific ghosts and the tempo begins to rise. Walls form, the floor appears beneath your moving feet, lights spark up, and, hey, we're at the disco!

Lindstrøm and Christabelle

Music In My Mind

Lindstrøm keeps it cranked up while a sultry vocal striptease by his Feedelity chanteuse, Solale Christabelle, has you glowing like the Ready Brek kid. A squelching, horned beast of a number which physically attacks the spinning glitter ball and smashes into a million reflecting fragments.

Diskjokke

Reset And Begin

If Neu! had gone digital dancefloor, they might have sounded like Diskjokke, aka Oslo disco prodigy Joakim Dyrdahl. There's light and shade simultaneously; it's like driving with the hood down through seemingly endless green fields then blacking out in the blink of an eye and careering down darkened city streets in search of sanctuary. Not dark, nor light, but both at once.

Tussle

Night Of The Hunter (Prins Thomas remix)

Stay on those darkened city streets, prowling around fashionable districts and stray into a chic glass-walled boutique where mannequins in designer sunglasses pull jerky dance shapes while scrutinising their reflections for any slight flaw. San Francisco's Tussle soundtrack their every move, smoking it up at the Roxy end of the high life.

Nisennenmondai

Destination Tokyo

Nisennenmondai are a Japanese three-piece who have previously garnered much approval by nailing themselves firmly to the no-wave mast with songs entitled 'This Heat' and 'Sonic Youth'. Now they're soaring into the Tokyo night with a wired, garage-y take on the fundamentals of Krautrock and damn fine at that.

KXP

18 Hours

'18 Hours' is what Primal Scream think they sound like – a full-blown glam stomp plated in metal and chrome, echoing through a howling void. In 1973, everyone thought this was how all rock'n'roll would sound by now.

Sunburned Hand Of The Man

The Parakeet Beat (Bjørn Torske remix)

In which our favourite tribe of far-out road warriors career off into the distance on the back of a ramshackle lorry; jamming, jangling and rattling out the spirit of campfire improv all the way.

Toy

Woodpecker

A final fanfare of radiophonics from this UK/Norwegian duo, an evening epilogue that worms its way into your brain and lingers, too.

subscribe

If your curiosity was piqued by **Pil and Galia Kollektiv's** feature, **sign up this month and get a free copy of the definitive new DAF compilation, *Das Beste Von DAF – 20 Lieder der Deutsch Amerikanischen Freundschaft*, released in March on Mute's Grey Area imprint.**



"The years between the late Sixties and the mid-Seventies form the cultural space that punk traversed so quickly by making explicit the inherent violence and reactionary individualism that hippy ideal contained. In this respect, it is particularly interesting to follow the evolution of the DAF sound from their 1979 debut to the highly polished trilogy of *Alles Ist Gut*, *Gold Und Liebe* and *Für Immer*, to see how the band negotiated the impossible truce between the openness and experimentation of Krautrock and the crude, brutal minimalism of punk, eventually betraying both. If punk was an ugly version of what the counterculture wanted to hide from itself, DAF were the horrible truth that punk did not dare utter to itself."

Pil and Galia Kollektiv, *Plan B* #43

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P J Harvey & John Parish



A Woman A Man Walked By

The Album Out 30th March On CD, Deluxe LP & Digital
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